

Brilliant New Serial—QUEST OF THE GOLDEN APE—Begins In This Issue!

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BY THE EDITOR

Mind if we use this space to whet your appetite for the great new three-part serial that starts in this issue of *Amazing*? Titled "Quest of the Golden Ape," it was done jointly by two of the best writers in the business. Ivar Jorgensen and Adam Chase. Frankly, we were a little worried when they came into the office with the idea for the story; not because we had any doubts about their ability, but collaboration is a touchy thing. Could two finished craftsmen get together over a typewriter and become a solid working unit?

Well, any doubt we had was dispelled when they brought in the finished script. Not since we used to read Burrough's Mars stories, long ago, has a yarn given us such a thrill.

In "Quest," we have a hero, Bram Forest, a protagonist of majestic proportions, who can walk without apology beside the immortal John Carter. We have the fabulous world of Tarth, where, on the Plains of Ofrid, Bram seeks to uncover age-old secrets; where he seeks the identity of Portox, the Nadian, meets Jlomec the Gentle, Retoc the Abarian Scourge, and is found by Ylia, the beautiful brown-skinned virgin who can tell Bram of the horrible manner in which his mother died. The action moves around The Great Clock of Tarth to the Ice Fields, where the strange Chameleon Men, seeming phantoms, face the terrible whip swords of the Abarians.

We can of course give you but the sketchiest of details, but take our word for it, "Quest" is a *great* story in the fast-vanishing tradition of magnificent heroes and titanic planet-spanning concepts. Read the first installment and we guarantee you'll be waiting breathless for the second.—PWF

# AMAZING

STORIES

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They were bent upon rapine and slaughter—



# QUEST OF THE GOLDEN APE



and what greater prize than the Queen herself?

# QUEST OF THE GOLDEN APE

By IVAR JORGENSEN  
and ADAM CHASE

*How could this man awaken with no past—no childhood—no recollection except of a vague world of terror from which his mother cried out for vengeance and the slaughter of his own people stood as a monument of infamy?*

## CHAPTER I

### *Mansion of Mystery*

IN A SECLUDED section of a certain eastern state which must remain nameless, one may leave the main highway and travel up a winding road around tortuous bends and under huge scowling trees, into wooded country.

Upon a certain night—the date of which must remain vague—there came a man who faced and was not turned back by a series of psychological barriers along this road which made it more impregnable than a steel wall. These barriers, which had kept out a hundred years of curiosity-seekers until that certain night, were forged by the scientific magic of a

genius on a planet far beyond the sun. . . .

The man who boldly followed his headlights up the road was of middle age with calm, honest eyes and a firm mouth indicating bargains made in his name would be kept. He pushed on, feeling the subtle force of the psychological powers against him but resisting because he vaguely understood them.

He left his car presently and raised his hand to touch the hard outline of a small book he carried in his breast pocket and with the gesture his determination hardened. He set his jaw firmly, snapped on the flashlight he had taken from the dash of his convertible and moved on up the road.

His firm, brisk steps soon



brought him to its end, a great iron gate, its lock and hinges rusted tight under the patient hand of Time. It was high and spiked and too dangerous for climbing. But someone had smashed the lock with a heavy instrument and had applied force until the rusted hinges gave and the gate stood partially open. From the look of the metal, this could have been done recently—even in the past few minutes.

The man entered and found a flagstone pathway. He followed this for a time with the aid of his flashlight. Then he stopped and raised the beam.

It revealed the outline of a great stone mansion, its myriad windows like black, sightless eyes, its silent bulk telling of long solitude, its tongueless voice whispering: *Go away, stranger. Only peril and misfortune await you here.*

But I am not exactly a stranger, the man told himself, approaching the door and half hoping to find the scowling panel locked.

But it was not locked. The ponderous knob turned under his hand. The panel moved back silently. The man gripped his flashlight and stepped inside.

The knowledge that he was no longer alone came as a shock. It was brought to him by the sound of labored breathing and he flashed the light about frantically trying to locate the source of the harsh sound. Then the bright circle picked out a huddled form on the floor nearby. The man moved forward instantly and went to his knees.

He was looking into an incredibly ancient face. The skin was so deeply lined as to hang in folds around the sunken eyes. The mouth was but a toothless maw and the body so shrunken as to seem incapable of clinging to life. The voice was a harsh whisper.

"Thank God you have come. I am dying. The opening of the gate took all my remaining strength."

"You have been waiting for me?"

"I have been waiting out the years—striving to keep life in my body until the moment of destiny. I wanted to see *him*. I wanted to be there when the door to his resting place opens and he comes forth to right the terrible wrongs that have been done our people."

The strength of the ancient one was ebbing fast. The words he spoke had been an

effort. The kneeling man said, "I don't understand all this."

"That matters not. It is important only that you keep the bargain made long ago with your sire, and that you are here. Someone must be with him at the awakening."

The newcomer again touched the book in his pocket. "I came because our word had been given—"

The dying man picked feebly at his sleeve. "Please! You must go below! The great clock has measured the years. Soon it tolls the moment. Soon a thundering on the Plains of Ofrid will herald the new age—the Fighting Age—and a new day will dawn."

While the visitor held his frail shoulders, the dying man gasped and said, "Hasten! Hurry to the vault below! Would that I could go with you, but that is not to be."

And then the visitor realized he was holding a corpse in his arms. He laid it gently down and did as he had been directed to do.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Great Clock of Tarth*

THE Plains of Ofrid on the planet Tarth stretched flat and monotonous as far as

the eye could reach, a gently waving ocean of soft, knee-high grass where herds of wild stads grazed and bright-hued birds vied in brilliance with the flaming sun.

From the dark Abarian Forests to the Ice Fields of Nadia, the plain stretched unbroken except for the tall, gray tower in its exact center and it was toward this tower that various groups of Tarthans were now moving.

Every nation on the planet was represented in greater or lesser number. The slim, erect Nadians in their flat-bottomed air cars that could hang motionless in space or skim the surface of the planet at a thousand jeks an hour. The grim-faced Abarians, tall and finely muscled on their powerful stads, their jeweled uniforms flashing back the glory of the heavens. The Utalians, those chameleon men of Tarth, their skins now the exact color of the grasses across which they rode, thus causing their stads to appear unmounted and unguided.

All the nations of Tarth were represented, drawn toward the tower by a century-old legend, a legend which Retoc the Abarian clarified as he rode at the head of his own proud group.

He waved a hand, indicating the vast plain and spoke to Hultax, his second in command, saying, "Little would one think that this flat, empty land was once the site of a vast and powerful nation. One of the greatest upon all Tarth!" A smile of cruelty and satisfaction played upon his handsome features as he surveyed the plain.

"Aye," Hultax replied. "The realm of the Ofridians. Truly they were a great nation."

"But we Abarians were greater," Retoc snapped. "We not only defeated them but we leveled their land until not one stone stood upon another."

"All save the tower," Hultax said. "No weapon known could so much as scratch its surface."

A new voice cut in. "Quite true. Portox' scientific skill was too great for you." Both Abarians turned quickly to scowl at the newcomer, Bontarc of Nadia, who had swung close in his one-man car and was hovering by their side.

Retoc's hand moved toward the hilt of his long whip-like sword, driven there by the look of contempt in Bontarc's eyes.

But Retoc hesitated. A formidable squadron of Bontarc's Nadian fighting men hovered nearby and the Abarian had no taste for a battle in which the odds were close to even.

"We defeated the Ofridians fairly," he said.

"And slaughtered them fairly? Cut down the men and women and children alike until the entire nation was obliterated?"

The systematic annihilation had taken place a century before when Bontarc had been but a child and Retoc a young man. Karnod, Retoc's father, now dead, had planned the war that defeated the Ofridian's, his winning card having been spies in the court of Evalla, Queen of Ofrid. Karnod had been fatally wounded during the last battle and had delegated to his son the task of annihilating the Ofridians and levelling their nation. This task, Retoc accepted with relish, reserving for himself the pleasure of slaying Queen Evalla. Details of the torture to which Retoc subjected the beautiful Evalla were whispered over the planet and it was said the sadistic Retoc had taken photographs of the Queen in her agony to enjoy in later years.

It had been the scientific

ability of Portox of Ofrid that had engendered the Abarian hatred and jealousy in the first place. Portox used his science for the good of all on the planet Tarth, but when Karnod, Lord of Abaria, struck, no other nation came to Ofrid's aid. Then it was too late, because Abaria's military might greatened as a result of the Ofridian defeat and only an alliance of all other nations could have conquered them.

Ironically, Portox had never been captured.

Now as the tall gray tower came into view, Bontarc's mind was filled with thoughts of Portox, the Ofridian wizard. It was said that Portox had been able to travel through space to other planets that were known to exist, that he had left Tarth and found safety somewhere across space, first building his tower which would never be destroyed; that a great clock within it was measuring off one hundred years—the time on the planet Tarth of an infant's development into manhood—and that at the end of that span the clock would toll and there would come forth a man to avenge the slaughter of the Ofridians.

Bontarc turned suddenly

upon the dour Retoc. "Tell me," he said, "is there any truth to the legend that the clock in the tower will toll the end of one hundred years?"

"None whatever," the sadistic Abarian snapped. "A rumor passed from the lips of one old woman to another."

Bontarc smiled. "Then why are you here? The hundred years are up today."

Retoc's hand moved toward his whip-sword. "Are you calling me a liar?"

Bontarc watched alertly as the blade came partly from its scabbard. "If we fight we may miss the tolling of the clock," he said evenly.

With an oath, Retoc pushed the sword back into its scabbard and put sharp heels to his stad's flanks. The animal screamed indignantly and rocketed ahead. Bontarc smiled and turned his car back toward his own group.

And now they were assembled and waiting, the curious of the planet Tarth. Would the clock toll as it was rumored Portox had said? Would an avenger come forth to challenge Retoc and his Abarian hordes?

There was not much time left. Swiftly the clock ticked off the remaining moments and the end of one hundred

years was at hand. Silence settled over the assembled Tarthans.

Then a great sound boomed over the plains; a single ringing peal that rose majestically into the air, reverberated across the empty land that once had been the site of a thriving, prosperous nation. The first part of the legend had been fulfilled.

Then, suddenly, chaos reigned. With a great thundering that shook the ground upon which they stood, the gray tower exploded in crimson glory; a great mushrooming blossom of red fire erupted skyward hurling the assembled Tarthans to the ground where they lay in numbed stupor.

The thunderous report echoed across the plain ten thousand times louder than the tolling of the clock. But aside from the initial dulling shock, no Tarthan was injured because the crushing power rose upward.

There was an expression of mute wonder on Bontarc's face. And he thought: We have not seen the end of this. It is only the beginning. But the beginning of what? Only Portox could have known. And Portox was—where?

Bontarc started his car and moved across the plain

sensing cosmic events but not knowing . . .

Not knowing that the sound of the tolling clock had gone with more than the speed of light across the void, had been flung arrow-straight to a brooding mansion in the heart of a thick forest upon another planet; to the door of a cavern deep in the rock beneath the mansion.

That even now the lock of this door had responded to the electronic impulse and the huge panel was swinging slowly open.

### CHAPTER III

#### *The Man in the Cavern*

AS THE sound of the tolling clock died out across the Plains of Ofrid, a man opened his eyes on the planet far away and saw for the first time the place in which he had spent one hundred years.

He awoke with neither fright nor surprise but rather with a sense of wonder. He arose slowly from the great bed upon which he had lain and allowed his attention to roam about the strange place in which he found himself.

In the wall opposite the bed there was set a full length mirror and as the man turned

he saw himself for the first time; a tall, broadly-muscled figure of heroic proportions. Completely naked, his body was reflected as masculine perfection in every detail.

For a few moments, the man stared at the body as though it belonged to someone else. Then he spoke musingly. "You did your work well, Portox, my friend."

The sound of his own voice startled him but not so much so as the content of the words. A baffled expression touched his handsome face. Who was Portox? And what work had he done? What place was this—and for that matter, who was he himself, this naked figure which looked back at him from the glittering mirror?

The questions were annoying because he felt that he knew the answers. Yet they would not come within reach of his conscious mind.

He had little time to ponder this enigma however because at that moment he became aware of a second presence in the room. He turned. A man stood just inside the open door.

The naked one stared at the other with an interest that left no room for self-consciousness nor shame. "Who are you?" he asked.

"My name is John Pride," the man answered. He was a man of erect bearing and though there was wonder and surprise in his voice he bore himself with a quiet dignity. "And now, he added, "may I ask you the same question?"

The naked man looked down at his own body and for the first time seemed conscious of its nudity. He glanced around the room and saw a robe of royal purple lying across a chair by the bed. He stepped over and lifted the robe and put it on. As he was tying the rich purple cord around his waist he looked frankly back at John Pride and said, "I do not know. I honestly do not know."

John Pride said, "I have wondered what I would find in this cavern—wondered through the years. Only in my wildest fancies did I tell myself that a fellow human—or even a living creature—awaited me here. But now I find this is true."

The younger man regarded his visitor with a calmness that belied any wariness between them. John Pride noted this with admiration and respect. The young man said, "Won't you be seated?" and when his guest was comfort-

able, regarded him with a smile. "Perhaps there are some things we should talk over."

"Perhaps there are. You say you do not know your own name?"

"That only begins to sum up my ignorance. I am not only unaware of my identity but I haven't the faintest notion of what this place is—where it is—or how I came here."

It was John Price's turn to stare. While doing so, he analyzed the younger man keenly. He saw honesty and an inner warmth that attracted him. There was something almost godlike in the clean lines of the body he had seen and in the face. These things coupled with what he already knew, intrigued him mightily and he resolved to approach this strange affair with an open mind and not play the role of the unbelieving cynic. It was time to go ahead.

John Pride said, "First, are you aware that there is another in this mansion—or was?"

"I did not even know this was a mansion. It seems only one room."

"It is an enormous structure set deep in the forest."

"This other one—?"

"A very old man. He died as I arrived here tonight."

"You do not know his name or how came he here?"

"I have a vague idea."

The young man's dazzling blue eyes narrowed in thought. "A while ago you said you have wondered through the years as to what you would find in this room. That indicates you were aware of its existence."

"True. Perhaps at this point I had better tell you the complete story—as much of it as I know."

"I would be in your debt."

"No, I will merely be discharging the last of a very old obligation."

With that, John Pride took from his pocket a small leather covered book. He handled it gently, almost with affection, and said, "This was my father's notebook. In it, is an account of this remarkable affair, put down by my great grandfather and handed down through the line. When my father died he placed it in my hand saying it entailed an obligation both business and personal and it was my obligation as well as his."

"I have read the account of what transpired many times and with your permission I will put it into my own words. Then, when I am done,



I will give you the book and the affair will be over so far as I and my family are concerned."

John Pride had settled back in his chair and was just ready to begin when the young man held up a sudden hand. "Just one moment—please," he said, and a look of concentration came upon his face. Then he went on and his words took the form of a rhyme:

"An ape, a boar, a stallion,  
A land beyond the stars.  
A virgin's feast, a raging  
beast,  
A prison without bars."

He flushed and added: "I don't know why I was possessed to recite that doggerel at just this moment but there is something strange about it. Strange in that I have a feeling it was taught to me at some long distant time in the past. I sense that it is very important to whatever destiny awaits me. Yet I know not who taught me the verse nor what it means."

"That verse is inscribed in this book and I believe I know how it entered your mind and memory. I believe too, that I understand how you are able to converse with me though you know nothing

of this land or even this room," John Pride said quietly.

"Then please tell me!"

"I think it better that I start at the beginning rather than give you the story piece-meal. That way, your mind will be better able to assimilate and to judge."

"I await your pleasure," the young man said with impatience he strove to conceal.

"Very well," John Pride said, his eyes growing vague with a far-away look.

## CHAPTER IV

### *John Pride's Story*

"I AM a member," John Pride began, "of a firm called Pride, Conroy, and Wilson. We are a very old firm of private bankers with offices in Wall Street. Both Conroy and Wilson died before I was born, leaving no issue, so the company has been controlled by a Pride for many years.

"This affair in which we are interested had its inception one hundred years ago. At that time, a man came to see my great grandfather in his office. He was a most remarkable man and gained my grandfather's respect and confidence from the very first.

He never stated from whence he came, being more interested in the future than in the past. He put up at a New York City hotel and my great grandfather knew there were three in his party; the man himself, another man and a woman both somewhat older than he.

"At one time when my great grandfather visited them in their hotel suite, he saw the woman fleetingly as she was leaving the room. She was carrying something that he thought could have been an infant snuggled in a blanket. He could not be sure however and he did not ask questions.

"The man was interested in obtaining a place of abode, a place that had to possess certain definite qualifications. First, it had to be built upon solid rock and set in the most secluded location possible.

"Second, it had to be so completely free of legal involvements that when he secured title, no possible claim of another could ever be taken seriously enough to even cause the property to be visited. In short, the strange man said, details relevant to the property must integrate to a point where no one would visit it for one hundred years."

At this place in his narrative, John Pride stopped a moment to rest his voice. After a pause, the young man in the purple robe inquired, "Why do you smile?"

"At the recollection. My great grandfather had just a white elephant—"

"A white elephant?"

"Merely a descriptive term. A place that had been built before the Revolution but which even at that early time had been bypassed by the trend of progress until it was completely isolated. No one wanted it. No one would ever want it so far as my great grandfather could judge."

"Except this strange man you speak of."

"Precisely. He was delighted with the place and when my great grandfather pointed out that even with the location and the high surrounding wall there was no guarantee that wandering adventurers might not move in and take possession at some distant date, the man smiled cryptically and said he would see to it that that did not occur."

The young man was scowling. "I know that man. He is somewhere back in my mind, but he will not come forward."

John Pride regarded his listener for a moment and then went on. "The man seemed in ample funds and paid for the property with a giant ruby the like of which my great grandfather had never before set eyes on.

"But the affair was far from ended. The man moved his *ménage* into the mansion saying he would call upon my great grandfather later.

"All the legal formalities had been of course taken care of—an indisputable deed, guaranteed by the strongest trust company in the land. But that was not enough.

"After a few weeks, during which time the man had inquired of my great grandfather where certain materials could be obtained, he returned to the old gentleman's office with the most startling request of all.

"He said that he had set in motion a procedure that would terminate in exactly one hundred years from a given moment and that he wished to retain grandfather's firm as trust agents in relation to that procedure. The duties of the firm would be negligible during the hundred-year period. My great grandfather and his issue were merely to remain com-

pletely away from the property which was certainly a simple thing to do.

"But knowledge of what had taken place must be passed down to his son and in case the latter did not survive the one hundred years, to his son's son.

"At this point my great grandfather interposed reality in the form of a question: 'I have a son but suppose he is so inconsiderate as to not duplicate with a male heir?'

"The man smiled and said he was sure that would not be the case. He was right, but whether it was a gamble on his part or whether he spoke from a knowledge beyond us, we never knew.

"But regardless—at the end of one hundred years the surviving issue was, by sacred trust, to be present in this mansion. The door of a vault beneath it would open and the trustee was to enter and deliver therein a written account of the series of events leading up to that moment.

"In payment for this service, the man insisted upon presenting my great grandfather with jewels the value of which on a yearly basis transcended all our other income combined. My great grandfather demurred but the man said nothing brightens

memory so much as material gain and he did not want the agreement to be forgotten."

"What happened to the man?" the young listener asked.

John Pride shook his head sadly. "We never knew. When all the arrangements were made, he came again to the office, thanked my great sire for his services, and was never seen again."

"He must have given you his name."

John Pride frowned. "He used a name of course but there was the impression of its not being his true one. The book mentions this. The name he used was C. D. Bram."

"Portox!" the young man cried suddenly.

"What did you say?"

"Portox. The name is back in my mind. I used it as I awoke."

"A strange name."

"And stranger still is the fact that I know nothing of it—wait!" The young man's handsome features strained as he concentrated with all his power. Sweat stood out on his forehead. But then a look of disappointment came into his face and his broad shoulders sagged. "No. The knowledge is somewhere back in my mind but I cannot capture it."

John Pride was about to

speak but the young man stayed him with a sudden intense look. "One thing however is very clear to me."

"And that is—?"

"The face of my mother."

"The woman who held you in her arms in the hotel suite?"

"No, I do not think so. But I see a face clearly in my mind. A sad and beautiful face. There is a marked resemblance between it and what I see in that mirror. She is the most beautiful woman who ever lived and I yearn to find her and take her in my arms."

"I hope you succeed."

A tragic light appeared in the young man's eyes. "But where is she? How can I find her? Why did she leave me in **this place?**"

"I do not have the answers to those questions. But I have a theory concerning you and the elapsed years."

"Tell me!"

John Pride spoke firmly but with obvious awe. "I think you were brought here as an infant for some reason known only to the one who called himself C. D. Bram."

"Or Portox."

"Perhaps. I think you were placed in that bed and left there for one hundred years."

"But—"

"Consider. That door has never been opened. There is certainly no other exit to this cavern."

"And I have no recollection of ever having lived before," the young man said slowly.

"Yet you can converse with me. You obviously have been given an education."

"But how?"

"It is known that knowledge can be injected into the subconscious while the receiver sleeps. I'm sure the man you insist upon calling Portox was aware of this—this and perhaps other scientific miracles. Who are we to say that you were not nourished by some means beyond our knowledge?"

But that investigation was never to be made because as John Pride extended his hand to touch the box it suddenly burst into a glow and he withdrew his fingers quickly.

Before the younger man could answer a glowing point of light sprang into being and brightened and a wave of searing heat erupted from the walls of the room, searing the eyes of John Pride and leaving him to grope helplessly as in the heart of a furnace. The younger man was beyond his reach. Blinding pain caused him to reel.

## CHAPTER V

### *Question Upon Question*

JOHN PRIDE opened his eyes as a moan escaped his lips. The haze cleared and he found himself lying upon a cool stone floor looking up into the concerned face of the younger man. "What happened?" John Pride asked feebly. He tried to refocus.

"I don't know except that the heat of that fire was upon us with such swiftness that we were almost incapacitated. I picked you up and started walking. Fortunately I moved in the direction of the door. Otherwise we would have been doomed."

"I am in your debt."

"No more so than I in yours."

"Did you extinguish the fire?"

"It burned out of its own accord. But only after the cave was completely gutted. There is nothing left in there but the bare rock walls."

John Pride sat up with quick concern. "The book!"

"It is gone." The young man looked ruefully down at his own naked body. "Gone—together with my precious robe."

"That can easily be replaced along with other rai-

ment but the book—I was supposed to deliver it—”

“—to the cavern. You did that, my friend. It was not through you that the fire consumed it. You have dispatched your obligation. Let your mind be at ease.”

John Pride got to his feet. He shook his head in the negative. “No. A portion of my obligation still exists. Fortunately I did not bring forth the second and last item I was to place in the cavern.”

“The second item?”

“Yes, and I believe the most important.”

With that, Pride took from his pocket a small box wrapped in heavy material and sealed and resealed with a sort of rubberized wax.

“This,” he said. “I know not what is in the box nor I think, did my father, my grandfather, nor my great grandfather before me. We have been given to understand that its delivery to the cavern was the most important single duty of the trust. So I now place it in your hands, praying that this act fulfills the long-standing obligation of my family.”

The younger man had salvaged a portion of his robe, a length of material that went over his shoulders and draped

skimpily down the sides of his body. This did nothing whatever in the way of covering his nudity but rather accentuated and added to it.

He took the box and was scanning it with great interest when the excitement and strenuous action of the preceding few minutes again took grip upon John Pride’s comparatively less rugged physique.

His eyes closed and he began sinking again to the floor whereupon the younger man slipped the box hastily in the pocket that had not burned away from his robe and caught John Pride in his arms.

He lifted the elder man and carried him up from the mansion caverns and into the great hall that swept forward to the main entrance. As he walked, bearing the heavy burden as though it were but a mere feather, he was of two minds.

One mind entertained concern for his new-found friend and the other was occupied with interest in these new and strange surroundings.

Dawn had broken over the forest and in a brooding light within the great hall, he saw the withered body of the dead man on the floor. He paused for a moment and then went

out across the flagstone porch and into the open air.

He marveled at the green expanse of forest that reared in majesty about him. He drew in deep gusts of the cool air and found it good. He smiled.

Then John Pride stirred in his arms and showed signs of returning consciousness. The young man laid the financier on the soft grass and watched until his eyes opened.

"Are you feeling better? Is there anything I can do?"

John Pride smiled feebly as he raised himself with the younger man's aid. "I'm afraid this has been more strenuous than I bargained for. If I'd known what would transpire I would have kept myself in better condition."

"But you feel better now?"

"Yes. If you will be so good as to help me to my car, I'll be all right."

"Certainly. Your car—?"

"A means of conveyance that will take me back to the city. It stands but a few yards down the road beyond the gate."

A short time later, the two men stood at the place that was to be the parting of their ways. Both sensed this and Pride held out his hand. The younger man grasped it firmly.

"Godspeed to you, my friend," John Pride said. "I fear I can help you no further but if there is ever a time when my services are needed, I will be waiting for your command."

"Thank you. Whatever befalls me I will always remember you as the first friend I ever set eyes upon in this world."

With that, John Pride turned his car and drove off down the winding road. As he left, the younger man realized the older man had said nothing of the dead ancient in the great hall but realized it was because of the strain Pride had suffered. The man was still somewhat dazed from the shock of the fire.

He turned and walked slowly back toward the mansion until he stood again in the great front yard. There he stopped and stood looking up at the sun as it topped the hill east of the mansion.

"Who am I?" he asked himself. "Why was I given knowledge but not all the knowledge necessary to intelligently pursue my destiny? In my heart there is a certainty that I am an educated man. I am aware of the fact that there are different groups of people who speak different lan-



guages and I know I will be able to converse with any I meet.

"I know that there are planets and stars and moons and I know what is to be known of the universe. But where is the exact personal knowledge that would help me in my dealings with the future? Why was I left here carefully tended and provided for these hundred years only to be hurled suddenly upon my own?"

He walked slowly into the great hall and knelt beside the still figure on the floor. A feeling of compassion stirred him but there was no warmth of recognition, no personal

sorrow as a result of the ancient's death.

"Have I ever seen you before?" he asked softly. "Were you—Portox?"

The dead one did not answer and the young man lifted him and took him from the hall and buried him. He could find no tools to dig the soil but located a hole that had once been a shallow well. He dropped the body therein and followed it with stones until the hole was filled. He did this with no sense of callousness but rather with an impersonal reverence he instinctively felt but could not analyze.

Returning slowly to the front yard, he pondered the



The cryptic verse had become a visual symbol in Bram's mind.

dimension of time. How, he wondered, could John Pride's line have gone through three sires to John Pride, the last of the males, while he himself lay for one hundred years to emerge in his obvious prime? Or perhaps even on the near side of his prime.

He pondered this and other points until his mind grew weary from unanswered questions and turned to things of the moment.

"I know not what my destiny is but at least I am able to have a name. What shall it be?"

He remembered the one Portox had used—C. D. Bram. "Bram," he said. "That I like." But the C. D. meant nothing to him and Bram seemed somehow incomplete.

"John Price had a name of two parts," he said, "so why should I not have the same?"

He looked about him and a breeze in the green branches above seemed to whisper the answer. He heard and considered, then smiled to himself, raised his voice.

"I christen myself Bram Forest, to be known from this moment on by that name."

Suddenly his smile deepened, then laughter welled from his great chest; a laughter arising from the sheer joy of

this new thing called living into which he had stepped.

Now he stretched his arms over his head, palms upward as though supplicating to some far-off deity. He leaped high in the air testing his muscles and finding them good.

Then he was running, naked and golden off across the open hill. He ran until his huge chest pounded with delicious pain as his lungs labored for air. Finally he dropped to the ground and lay spread-eagled looking up at the sky.

He laughed long and joyously.

He lay for a long time thus, then suddenly remembered the box John Pride had given him. But the scanty garment had dropped from his shoulders so he sprang to his feet and ran back until he discovered it.

The box was still there. He examined it curiously turning it over and over in his hands. The seal was stubborn but it finally gave and he peeled off the heavy wrapping. A small white box came to light.

This he opened to stand frowning at what it contained. An odd instrument of some sort—a flat disc about two inches in diameter and possibly a quarter of an inch thick. Both faces were of

shining, crystalline metal reflecting back anything that was imaged upon them.

Two short metal straps appended from opposite sides of the queer instrument, one of which held a buckle at its end. He held the shining disc to his ear but there was no sound that he could detect.

Frustrated he looked again into the box. It appeared to be empty. But no. As he was about to fling it away, he noted that what appeared to be its inner bottom was in reality a second flat package that fitted perfectly into the receptacle. He shook it free and found it to be merely a flat rectangle wrapped tightly in white paper.

He was about to rip the paper with his thumbnail when his attention switched suddenly to the shining disc. He had envisioned a use for it; or at least a place for which it seemed constructed.

He tested his theory and found the straps fit snugly and perfectly around his wrist. He pondered which wrist to place it on and decided the right one would be appropriate. Quickly, he snapped the buckle into its hasp and then held forth his arm to admire the brightness of the queer device.

If he had expected anything to happen, he was disappointed and he stood there wondering what use was to be found from such a seemingly useless device.

After a while he unbuckled the disc and moved it to his left wrist. Perhaps it would look better there. Again he raised his arm to admire it and had stood thus for some moments when he became conscious of an odd sickness in the pit of his stomach.

He did not associate this with the disc at all and immediately forgot the thing, giving his whole attention to the uncomfortable feeling that had come upon him.

The sickness increased in intensity and he bent down, doubling over his abdomen as the nausea became a pain. As he sank to his knees, he noted the disc had changed, had taken on an odd, transparent glow.

There had to be a connection between his illness and the abominable device and he clawed at the buckle, seeking to loosen it and hurl the thing away.

But there was no time. The pain sharpened and a black cloud dimmed his sight. He clawed feebly at the buckle and then his numbed fingers weakened, fell away from it.

The darkness increased and seemed to lift him from the ground upon which he lay. It clawed at his throat, entered his nostrils like a malignant force.

As his consciousness faded a single thought was in his mind: *Born but to live a few brief moments and die again. What sense is there to such a farce as this? Born—but—to die—again. Portox! Help me! It can't be— There must be some help!*

## CHAPTER VI

### *On the Plains of Ofrid*

JLOMEC the Nadian guided his air car across the grassy plains of Ofrid but a scant few feet above the tops of the waving grasses.

It was a fine day and the Nadian was taking full advantage of it. One of a race of proud and noble fighting men, Jlomec was an exception to the rule in that he was a dreamer rather than a fighter, a thinker rather than a doer, a poet rather than a military strategist.

Thus, his mind dwelt upon the historic incident of the previous days when, standing beside his brother, Bontarc, he had watched the gray tower of Portox the Ofridian

explode into a fine cloud of dust.

And it was characteristic of the gentle Jlomec that his mind was more occupied with the romantic aspect of the incident than the violent. He thought of the poem, the bit of doggerel carved in the foundation stone of the tower. For a century all Tarthans had puzzled over the verse put there by Portox so long ago:

An ape, a boar, a stallion,  
A land beyond the stars,  
A virgin's feast, a raging  
beast,  
A prison without bars.

Had it any meaning? Jlomec wondered. A thousand different interpretations had been put upon the verse over the years, but no one knew for sure.

That it had something to do with the slaughter of the Ofridians, Jlomec was sure. But what?

As he ruminated thus, Jlomec's attention was caught by moving figures some ten jeks to the south. He knew this to be the location of one of the great wells that dotted the Plains of Ofrid.

In the times before the great massacre, these wells had been located in the hearts

of the fine Ofridian cities of which the Abarians stood in great envy. These wells gushed endlessly of cool crystal water which kept the fabulous hanging gardens of Ofrid multicolored and beautiful.

But all that was in the past. The Ofridians had been slain to a man and their cities leveled until not a stone stood upon a stone. Now lonely grasses grew where once glittered the results of Portox' great scientific genius. Now there were only round steel doors in the ground to mark the locations of the great Ofridian wells.

These thoughts occupied Jlomec's mind as he turned his car and coursed it in the direction of the well. The figures came clearly into view, causing Jlomec to frown in puzzlement.

What manner of people were these? There were a half dozen of them—two men, three females, and one babe-in-arms. Jlomec got the impression that—though they were erect and finely formed—that they were of short stature.

But now he realized he had got this impression only by their comparison to the seventh figure by the well. He knew at a glance that this seventh was an Abarian war-

rior, exceptionally tall and wearing the look of grim cruelty so characteristic of his race.

Jlomec paid the Abarian scant heed however, so engrossed was he in studying the strange half-dozen. Their skins were richly browned and they wore almost no clothing.

Who could they be? Jlomec wondered, and from whence had they come? Mightily intrigued, he moved forward until he came within earshot of the party. Then, for reason of the words he heard spoken, he halted his air car and frowned.

The Abarian, he recognized as the famed Retoc himself. A fierce stad pawed the ground nearby indicating how the tall, sneering commander of the Abarians had arrived at this spot. Retoc was known to roam the Plains of Ofrid at times, still savoring the destruction he and his sire, Harnod, had accomplished; pleasuring himself with memories of bodies piled high, of bloody swords and helpless cries of the dying.

Or was it for some other reason that Retoc roamed the plains? Was it a nameless fear that drove him there? Did the accusing face of Por-

tox the Ofridian genius still hang balefully in his memory? Had Portox acquainted the Abarian devil with knowledge that he alone carried in his guilty heart? And did that knowledge generate a fear that Retoc the Abarian could not rid himself of?

At any rate, he now stood between the brown people and the Ofridian well, enjoying a useless cruelty as was his custom.

The leader of the group extended his hands in supplication and said, "We only ask water, sire. A small thing, but long have we waited to quench our thirst."

Retoc said, "What manner of people are you?"

"Harmless ones. See? We are unarmed and peaceful."

"That does not answer my question. Tell me who you are and from whence you came. Then we will see whether my fancy dictates that you shall have water from this well."

Indignation and rage dimmed Jlomec's better judgment. He had glided in beyond range of Retoc's vision and now he leaped from his car and drew his wandlike whip-sword. "Is there no drop of common decency or compassion left in you, Retoc, that you do this thing to helpless people?"

The Abarian whirled with alarm not knowing what force might be arrayed against him. But when he saw the lone Jlomec, his composure returned and his self-assurance again took charge. Had the newcomer been Bontarc, the dreamy Jlomec's skillful brother, Retoc the Abarian would have conducted himself differently. But as it was, he sneered at the gentle Nadian and asked, "What business of this is yours, Jlomec?"

"Injustice is everyone's business. These people, whoever they are, ask only to drink." Jlomec's eyes blazed. "And drink they shall, Abarian!"

Retoc's handsome eyes glowed. No doubt as to the outcome of this contest. He drew his own sword and whipped its supple length through the air. "Since you choose to champion this scum, let's get on with it."

Had Jlomec's indignation not been of a quality to blind him to consequences, he would have perhaps hesitated. But hot with this injustice, he whipped his own sword and leaped at Retoc.

The latter, with a grim smile of confidence, parried the thrust with ease and ma-

nipulated his own whip-sword with a skill which few fighting men on the planet Tarth could have equalled.

The weapons were strange ones by Earth standards and would have probably been considered impractical. They were a good six feet in length with the supple resiliency of a fly casting rod. The trick of using them effectively lay in controlling the sway and whip of the long thin blades by skillful use of the wrist. An expert Tarthan swordsman could parry a thrust with a lightning whip of his blade, arc the singing steel in the opposite direction and perhaps bring his opponent down with a thrust that would enter between his shoulder blades, the sword still arced to describe half a circle.

In essence, this favorite weapon of the Tarthans was a combination of whip and sword and combat was a matter of thrusting at angles far wider than could be achieved with a stiff blade. A good Tarthan swordsman would have been an excellent billiard player on Earth for his knowledge of workable angles was of necessity supreme.

Retoc the Abarian was a master at this swordplay. Enjoying himself hugely because

there was little risk, he toyed with the less skillful Nadian. He did not intend to kill Jlomec, fearing the wrath of Bontarc. He meant only to teach the stupid Nadian a lesson he would not forget.

But as his blade sang and stung, its needle point darting in like the fangs of a snake's head, and as Jlomec's clumsy blade sought desperately to parry, Retoc's blood lust rose to the fore. The joy of dealing death to the helpless was upon him and with a swift thrust he allowed his blade to enter Jlomec's unprotected back just above the kidney, to streak upward through his body and pierce his heart.

Frightened at what he had done he jerked the blade free. Its entwined force whirled Jlomec in a complete circle from which he fell limply, dead before he hit the ground.

Retoc stood scowling at the fallen Nadian, his dripping blade rising and falling gently in the breeze as he held it extended. The Abarian's eyes darted to the group of brown-skinned folk, his anger centering upon them as he nimbly switched the blame for this foul murder from his own shoulders to theirs. If they had not been at the well—



He was ready to extend his slaughter in their direction, to wipe out the lot of them, when he paused, his scowl deepening. There was fear and awe upon their faces but they were not regarding either Retoc or his fallen adversary.

Their eyes were turned in another direction and Retoc sent his own glance after theirs. His eyes held upon what he saw. A naked man. But such a man as he had never before seen on all the planet Tarth.

## CHAPTER VII

### *The White God*

BRAM FOREST returned to consciousness and realized the black nausea of his previous moments had vanished. All traces of the sickness was gone as he opened his eyes, his mind intent upon the small flat package that had dropped from the box in which he had found the strange disc-like instrument. But the package was not within reach.

This caused only a small part of his bewilderment however. His attention was riveted mainly upon the tableaux being enacted before him. A group of people, al-

most as naked as himself, deeply browned of skin, stood huddled nearby.

Almost as though for the entertainment of these, two grim and uniformed warriors were facing each other on the level turf before the strange circular ground-entrance beside which Bram Forest found himself.

The two warriors possessed strange supple swords which they manipulated with much skill. At least, one of the warriors did. The other seemed clumsy in comparison but there was no hint of cowardice in his manner.

Upon closer inspection the two warriors who had seemed of a cut at first glance were quite dissimilar. The one of greater skill was dark and possessed of a cruel mouth and venomous dark eyes. The other was slim and fair with contemptuous blue eyes. He fought with an erect stiffness in his shoulders which was both awkward and dignified at the same time.

The sympathy of Bram Forest went out instinctively to the fair one but the dark, sinister swordsman held his attention. There was something naggingly familiar about the dark one's cruel face. A tantalizing familiarity that bemused Bram Forest

even as the singing swords thrust and parried with that of the dark warrior always on the offensive and the other fighter striving more for self-preservation than for aggressiveness.

Where, Bram Forest wondered had he seen the dark one before? Nowhere, of course. Any previous contact was impossible. Or was it? Dared he, Bram Forest, call anything impossible after what had already occurred.

Bram Forest glanced down and realized he had been removing the disc from his left wrist and placing it on his right. He had committed the act instinctively, in the same manner he breathed and moved and his mind went back momentarily to the two tubes he had found in his ears when he awoke in the cavern back on Earth.

Back on Earth? How did he know he was not still on that planet? I've got to stop questioning these things I possess knowledge of but know not why. I must take them at face value and without wonder. Otherwise I shall spend all my years in conflict with my own mind.

At that moment, the dark warrior's whip-sword whined in a skillful arc and entered the body of the fair one. A

moan of sympathy arose from the waiting group as the defeated warrior sank to the ground, his face strained in agony and fast becoming a death-mask.

The dark warrior stepped back, a cruel sneer of satisfaction gleaming in his eyes. Bram Forest, sickened by the unequal contest rose up from where he lay and moved forward. This drew the attention of both the group and the victorious warrior and the effect was electric.

The huddled observers reacted with a mixture of consternation, awe, and fear that would have been comic under less tense circumstances. They dropped as one to their knees. They placed their foreheads upon the ground. A concerted moan escaped them that far transcended in depth and feeling the one with which they had reacted to the death of the fair warrior.

In a language Bram Forest was completely familiar with, their voices sounded a chant of fear and awe. "The white god has come! The white god has come! The white god has come!"

Bram Forest scarcely considered them. He was advancing upon the dark warrior with the clean, stalking move-

ments of a tiger, his great shoulders low, his magnificent legs tense for the death spring.

The dark one was frozen from surprise. From whence had this naked white creature erupted? He stood stiff from sudden fear and uncertainty a moment too long and the hands of the avenger were upon him. The fingers of those hands were like steel talons driving deep into his throat and in his panicked mind he looked upon the face of death and found it horrible. He was being driven down to the ground, lower and lower in abject submission by this strange and terrible manifestation the brown-skinned ones had called a white god.

The dark warrior's mind raced and in his terrorized desperation a native cunning sprang to his aid. Using every ounce of his remaining strength, he forced words up from his tortured throat. "Would you kill an unarmed man?"

The words touched a responsive chord in Bram Forest's mind. The craven spoke aptly. By killing him thus, was not Bram Forest doing the same thing for which he had condemned the other?

Bram Forest straightened and hurled the cringing figure from him. "Then defend yourself, swine!" he cried and seized up the dead warrior's shining whip sword.

The dark one sought means of escape but he feared turning from this avenger as much as facing him. He could only play for time.

Rising, he retrieved his own sword and faced the other with his expression of fear not one whit abated. The man of the steel hands whipped the sword experimentally and the dark one was struck by a ray of hope. The other's actions with the blade were as clumsy as had been those of Jlomec the Nadian. Perhaps all was not lost.

The dark one gripped his blade and moved forward in the customary crouch of the Tarthan fighting man. Then elation welled up within him as the answering posture of the other revealed him as knowing nothing whatever of the whip-sword's use. The dark one's smile returned. God or not, the skill of this one with the ancient weapon of TARTH was even less than that of the pathetic Jlomec.

The dark warrior parried a clumsy thrust with ease and whipped his blade around to

harass the other's exposed back. "You are a fool!" he said, "whatever else you may be. As you die, give thought to the fact that you join a large company. Those who have faced the greatest swordsman of Tarth and fallen ignobly before his blade."

With that the dark one whipped his blade home and spun his adversary expertly in order to discover the exact point of entrance of the blade. His aim was true.

It was just a trifle low but the other fell heavily and the dark warrior withdrew his blade and wiped it uneasily. His nervousness sprang from fear. If one of these so-called gods had appeared, why not two, or four, or a dozen? The Tarthan swordsman, well up on the principles of discretion, felt a sudden urge to be quit of this locality.

It has indeed a disconcerting place. Brown folk, the identity and origin of which he knew not. A white creature with steel hands appearing from nowhere. What would the next manifestation be?

The dark warrior moved swiftly toward his waiting stad. He mounted and rode away and not until the figures about the well were tiny spots almost beyond range of his

vision, did he again breathe easily.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *The Brown Virgin*

BRAM FOREST moved from unconscious into a dark half-world of pain and frustration. He felt his flame-seared body to be hanging upon the edge of a black abyss into which he could neither fall nor draw away from.

At times, it seemed, gentle hands reached out to explore but were without the strength to draw him back from the perilous precipice upon which he hung.

There was an endless time of balance in this dark half-world and then the thick blackness faded to a gray, the precipice seemed to draw away of its own volition, and the pain within him lessened.

He opened his eyes.

He was lying on a bed of soft, cool moss in a semi-dark cavern with the sound of tinkling water in the distance. He lay staring at the ceiling for a long time, wondering into what manner of place he had come and how. Then his keen ears caught the sound of breathing other than his own; a soft breathing that fell gently upon his senses

and calmed rather than alerted him.

He turned his head and saw a beautiful, naked brown-skinned girl kneeling nearby but beyond his reach. He was struck first by the beauty of her face and form and then by the fact that she was not as completely brown as his first impression had given him to believe. Her breasts and loins were of pure white and droplets of shining water ran down her body.

She was in the act of replacing a sort of leather harness upon her person and Bram Forest realized she had just returned from bathing at whatever place the unseen water gurgled and laughed and that she was now dressing herself.

He held his peace until the act was completed, not wishing to embarrass her by making his consciousness known while she was nude.

After a few moments, the harness was in place and she rose to stand erect and shake out her dark shining hair. Bram Forest chose this time to speak. "I do not know who you are, but I am obviously in your debt. My gratitude."

The girl reacted like a startled fawn and drew back several paces. "You have regained consciousness?"

"It seems so. Where is this place and how came I here?"

"We brought you."

Bram Forest's brow furrowed in thought. "Oh, yes. Now I remember. There were a group of people such as you at the place I tried to fight the dark swordsman with his own weapons." Bram Forest chuckled ruefully. "It seems I did not fare so well."

"When we discovered you were not our god, the others wanted to leave you there to die but I resisted this as being inhuman and made them bring you here."

"Where are the rest?"

"They have returned."

"Returned whence?"

The girl lowered her beautiful head sadly. "That I cannot tell you."

Bram Forest smiled. "Be not so sad. The fact that you prefer to keep the information to yourself is no reason for near-tears."

"I am not sad for that reason, sire."

"Then why?"

"Because you asked the question and are even more surely therefore, not our god."

Bram Forest was deeply curious and half-amused at the trend of this conversation. "Tell me this, then. Why does

my asking the question eliminate all possibility of my being your god?"

"Because if you were the god we seek and yearn for, you would not have to ask where my people went. You would know."

"Instead of clarifying the situation," Bram Forest mused, "each question sends me deeper and deeper into a mental labyrinth."

"We risked our lives in going to the place you found us. It was forbidden to credit the ancient legend of our people. Therefore—"

"What legend?"

"That upon this day and at that place our god would appear to deliver us."

Bram Forest, now desperately seeking a question that would clarify rather than further befuddle, held up his hand. "Wait. If you expected a god to appear and I arrived on schedule, how can you be so sure that I am not he?"

"We thought so when you advanced upon the hideous Abarian and took his throat in your great hands. But when you not only allowed him to live but also suffered him to take up his whip-sword and come within an eyelash of killing you, we knew you were not our god."

Bram Forest nodded with understanding. "I can see now how stupid that act was. Certainly not a manner in which a genuine god would conduct himself." He glanced at the girl and smiled. "Please come closer that I may see you better."

She moved her head in the negative, reluctantly, Bram Forest thought, and replied, "If you were our god I would gladly place myself in your power to do with me as you would, but as you are mortal, I must remain away from you."

Bram Forest frowned. "Again things get murky."

"I am a virgin," the beautiful girl explained simply and with no self-consciousness whatever. "I must remain so until my time is ordained. If I lost my virginity, even through violation that I resist, I would immediately be delivered into the Golden Ape."

Bram Forest came upright, causing the girl to retreat a step further in alarm. "The Golden Ape, did you say?"

"Yes."

"And you are a virgin—"

This last was a statement rather than a question as Bram Forest sank back, his eyes misty with thought. "An ape, a boar, a stallion—"

he pondered. "A virgin's feast—"

The girl eyed him with concern. "Are you sure that your wound has not caused—"

"It is not that," he said, switching his mind back to things of the moment. "I'm just wondering—might you tell me your name without breaking any rules of reticence?"

"I am Ylia," she said with a childlike solemnity that touched Bram Forest.

"And does Ylia never smile?"

It seemed to him she made an effort to do this but was so unfamiliar with the expression that she could not manage it.

He extended a hand, not disconcerted that she did not come close and take it. He said, "Ylia, I would not again ask a question you did not wish to answer before. But I am mightily puzzled about the life you must have led—about that manner of males you have had contact with. They are certainly a miserable lot if a female of their race must look to her virtue every waking moment.

"As for me, Ylia—and please believe—I would no more touch you in desire than I would knowingly injure a

child. You are safe in my presence as in the most guarded room of a nunnery."

If he expected gratitude or a pat on the back for his nobility, he was rudely surprised. Ylia straightened, her young breasts protruding gracefully and if she did not react with anger, her face mirrored something close to it.

"Then I am not desirable?"

Bram Forest blinked. "I did not say that. You are one of the fairest I have ever set eyes upon."

This puzzled Ylia completely. "Then in the name of the Golden Ape, why—?"

Bram Forest raised his hand with a gesture of both interruption and surrender. "Please! Let us pursue this subject no further. The waters grow deep and I suspect quicksand at their bottom. There are questions in my mind. Allow me to bring them forth with the understanding that you do not have to answer any you do not wish to."

It was evident that Ylia's mind was also a bag of conundrums relative to this late candidate for godhood who had insulted her desirability and yet complimented her upon it at the same time. She moved forward and sat gracefully down near the moss



resting place of her patient.

Bram Forest was aware of her tenseness. She was like a beautiful animal ready to spring away at the first sign of hostile movement on his part. But he also got the impression that coming within reach of his arms thrilled her. He believed this even while knowing that she would have fought like a tigress against any advance upon his part.

He said, "Ylia, you are indeed a strange child. You remained here after your people left and brought me back from the brink of death even with the fear that I would rise up and violate you as soon as I acquired the strength to do so. Your thought processes are difficult to understand."

Ylia lowered her eyes. "You wished to ask some questions, sire."

"My name is Bram Forest. The *sire* ill-becomes you."

"Bram—Forest," she murmured experimentally. Then she raised her eyes and there dawned upon her face the most brilliant of smiles. Her look was one of both dignity and gratitude. "You do me much honor, Bram Forest!"

"Honor? I fail to understand."

Ylia's eyes glowed proudly. "Why, you treat me with

such respect that I could be even Volna herself!"

"And who is this Volna?"

Ylia was startled at this strange man's ignorance. "Why, everyone on Tarth knows of Volna, Princess of Nadia, sister of Bontarc, who is Prince of Nadia and ruler of that great nation. She is the most exquisitely beautiful woman ever to be born on Tarth."

"Fancy that," Bram Forest said with a lack of enthusiasm that proved marked disinterest. "I'm afraid I've never had the pleasure of the lady's acquaintance, nor of her illustrious brother, either."

Ylia lowered her eyes in sadness. "She was also the sister of Jlomec."

"And who, pray is Jlomec?"

"I thought you knew since you tried to avenge his death. He was the Nadian the cruel Abarian Retoc slew under your very eyes."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Bram Forest said. But the cowardly death had been accomplished and Bram Forest's mind did not dwell upon it as he could not see where it affected him one way or another.

"Ylia," he said, "take it as a supposition that I was born this very moment and know

nothing of this world or its customs. With that in mind, tell me of it—the things you would tell a wondering child.”

She glanced at him strangely. “I will tell you all that I am not bound to hold secret.”

“I would not wish to know more.”

The beautiful Ylia leaned forward, so preoccupied with the task she had set herself that all her reserve and wariness left her. Her action brought her lowered head close to Bram Forest's face and the sweet smell of her newly washed and shining hair was in his nostrils. Then he also became preoccupied with the map Ylia was drawing on the floor of the cavern.

Long they sat thus, Ylia enjoying her task and Bram Forest's facile mind drawing in each syllable she spoke and committing it to memory.

Finally the sun lowered and the interior of the cavern darkened until they could no longer see each other. The most important conviction Bram Forest arrived at from Ylia's discourse was indeed a startling one. He was certain that this Tarth was a twin planet to Earth of which there was complete knowledge in his mind. He could hardly escape the fact that

Tarth swung in an orbit exactly opposite to that of its more familiar counterpart, thus remaining invisible from it.

This conviction came to him through several things Ylia said and it was buttressed by a bit of Tarthan mythology she chanced to mention. The legend told of a flame-god, obviously the sun, which stood forth in its wrath one long-distant day and hurled two great stones at a demon who came from far away bent upon torment. This last Bram Forest thought, was perhaps a comet of great size that tore both worlds from the sun and set them upon their orbits. The existence of the mythological legend indicated too, that civilization on Tarth was not backward or at least had not been in ages gone.

In the more exact realm, Bram Forest learned that Tarth was far less watery than its invisible sister, scarcely half its surface consisting of ocean. It had two ice caps at the poles, known as the Outer Reaches and an equator termed the Inner Belt.

There were no isolated continents according to Ylia's map, all the dry surfaces

being connected by wide passages of land through the continuous ocean.

Ylia's description of the people interested Bram Forest most intensely. On Tarth, he learned, there was no association of nations, each mistrusting the others in a world where a state of continuous war at some point of the globe was an accepted state of affairs which no one sought to ameliorate.

Ylia herself was hazy upon the description and number of the nations. She thought some two hundred existed but only the most important could she describe.

The Abarians were the most successfully warlike, fearing only the Nadians to the south. This because though the Nadians were not aggressive and even treated other lesser nations in a kindly fashion, they possessed an inherent fighting skill and a power potential that had not been tested in recallable history. Though they had not fought for centuries, their potential had not lessened because such a folly would have been considered tantamount to national suicide on Tarth.

There were also the Utalians that Bram Forest visualized as some sort of lizard

men for the reason that they possessed the defensive characteristics of the chameleon. There was also another intriguing race, no member of which Ylia had ever seen. She referred to them as the Twin People of Coom, an area near the north Outer Reach. Bram Forest speculated upon what manner of people they would be and it came to him that the evolutionary processes on Tarth had not corresponded to those of Earth, where all members of the human race evolved into practically the same form.

Then a name came into Bram Forest's mind; a name that rose out of that mysterious well of knowledge in his subconscious; a well he could not explain but had been forced to accept. He no longer questioned it.

"Tell me of the Ofridians."

Ylia started as though he had slapped her. The deep brown of her beautiful face paled somewhat and her eyes grew very sad.

Bram Forest saw the sadness by the light of the moon, that had risen and was sending wan light in through the cavern's entrance. He only sensed the paleness from the tremor of Ylia's voice. "It grows late. I must go and bring food. Your strength

must be nurtured and greatened."

With that, she hurried off in the direction of the sounding water, leaving Bram Forest both bewildered and intrigued. Why had she reacted so violently to his question? And for that matter, why had he been able to ask the question in the first place? By what process did he know the name *Ofrid* and that it designated a nation on Tarth, without knowing of that nation and already possessing the knowledge for which he had begged the patient and beautiful Ylia?

Then he remembered that he had resolved not to wonder about these things—and at the same instant, remembered something else.

The small, flat package that had fallen from the box back on Earth. It had been his first thought upon regaining consciousness near the Ofridian well but it had been pushed from his mind by subsequent events.

How long ago had that been? He tried to assess the passage of time but failed. The only indication of its length was the fact that he bore no wound where the Abarian's blade had entered his body. That pointed to a long span of unconsciousness

but perhaps there were contributing factors.

He had sensed that the mysterious Ylia had at her command something that had healed him very swiftly but he had no proof of this.

At any rate, he had to retrieve the package if possible. But would it be possible? Granted the strange disc had brought him somehow from Earth to Tarth, would it repeat the process in the opposite direction?

He resolved to find out and began unbuckling the disc from its place on his right wrist.

As he did this a sound manifested outside the cavern but he was so intent upon his task that he gave little note. Quickly, he strapped the disc into its potent position on his left wrist. Then he sat tensely awaiting the reaction.

As he waited, the sound without became so pronounced he could no longer ignore it. He raised his head and saw a tall, sinister form outlined against the moonlight. He was unable to distinguish the features, but the outline told a sickening truth. Also the drawn whip-sword spoke eloquently of who this intruder was.

The Abarian of the Ofri-

dian well in search of prey. The cowardly assassin who would now enter and find a defenseless man and a beautiful girl who would set him aflame with lust.

Rage threw a red curtain over Bram Forest's eyes as he struggled up to meet the intruder. But the latter never saw him because at that mo-

ment the now-familiar nausea seized Bram Forest's vitals, doubling him over.

And when the Abarian had advanced into the cavern, he found only an empty bed of moss, Bram Forest having been snatched up and whirled into darkness by the relentless hand of time put into terrifying motion.

*(To be continued)*



# SAVAGE WIND

By HARLAN ELLISON

*If you came as an invader to a far planet and found menace in the forest—in the air around you—what seemed like brooding hatred in all the quiet places—would you expect also to find mercy and brotherhood? Neither did the invaders.*

WUMMEL, the Ruskind, saw the shining thing come down. He watched it from the stand of gnarlbushes as the pointed thing flamed across the sky, streaking toward the red sun. It flashed brightly above the land, and disappeared quickly.

Wummel's pointed face quivered, and his split tongue slipped in and out of his mouth nervously. It had not been a bird, *that* was obvious. Nor a beast of the land. Whatever it had been, it stirred a strange sensation within him.

As though he were seeing a long-missing brother returning from across the mountain passes, coming home, after a long, long absence. But that could not be:

this metal thing he had never seen before. Yet he could not banish the feeling.

Wummel, for the first time in a life filled with fears, was terribly frightened.

He crouched down, his triply-jointed legs crossing under him. He watched the sky. If the flaming thing was to make another appearance, he would not be caught by surprise.

The sun had slipped across the pale blotch of gray sky, when the thing appeared again. It dipped as it approached the forest, and banked down toward the yellow-feathertops of the trees. In a few moments Wummel saw the falling thing push its sharp beak into the trees,



The forest seemed to know—to understand.

and disappear through the foliage.

A muted roaring came, and a ropy pillar of angry smoke twisted up into the sky. The roaring grew in violence, then suddenly ceased. The semi-silence of the forest dropped down again, as though it had never been shattered.

The *swip-swip-swip* of the forest crickets resumed. The cough and growl of the land-beasts took up where it had died. A yellow-striped prow-cat slipped through the trees at the edge of the clearing. The wind whistled softly in among the yellow feather-leaves. The forest looked as it had always looked.

Only Wummel, of all the Ruskind, knew the thing had come, knew the forest was not as it had always been.

And he turned and scuttled off on digger fingers and triple-jointed legs to tell the Ruskind. He might have sent the message by thought to the One, who would have told the Ruskind. But somehow—this message had to be delivered personally. He moved through the undergrowth.

And in the forest, there was movement from the thing that had ceased to flame.

Captain Kovasic issued commands. "Sellers, send your crew into that section over there. See if you can find any sign of the creatures who built that village. Galen, take the flitter and see if those mountains are inhabited. Let's make this thorough, men. It's the last one before home."

He fitted the picture of a spaceman. Tall, bronzed from many suns; wide, blocky hands, altogether able hands that commanded. Eyes blue as the seas over which he had flown, a mouth that spoke sharply. A man with lines of character in his face; a man never beaten, searching for an ideal.

"This survey has to be *really* good, Charlie," the Captain said to his First. "They're kicking back home about the appropriations for the Mapping Command. They may swallow us into the mercantile guild systems. That wouldn't be good."

The First Mate said, "We'll make it Vern." Then, "You look tired, Vern. Catch any sleep during the last leg?"

The Captain shook his head. "You know me. 'No-Wink, No-Blink, No-Nod Kovasic' they called me at the Academy." Then he sobered.



"Bring something back, Charlie; something to open their eyes back home; to make them understand we're not just flitting around the galaxy. We have to keep the Command in business. It was thirty years coming. Be a hell of a note to lose it now."

The eyes watching the strange ones were huge, platter-like organs without lids. They watched unblinking as the strangers from the flaming thing tromped through the forest.

They were going to the village.

The thought went out from the One, to the other Ruskind, *Be careful, my children. They seem to bode no harm, but they are not of Ruska, they are not the Ruskind; not of the land, nor of the sea, nor of the air we know. Be careful.*

Wummel heard the warning thought, and hunkered deeper under the spread roots of the gnarl-bush. Yet . . . there was something about these strange erect wanderers that drew him.

Is it because I saw them first? he wondered. Or is it something else. I feel—I sense—a deeper bond in these strange ones. They are not wholly unknown to me.

He reached out daintily, searching with his mind, plucking delicately as though on some fragile musical instrument.

A stirring of buried racial memory. A common germ, a flame, a whirling nebula and a throwing-out of flashing arms. One parent. One world, so far back even the concept had been drowned by memory on memory. Much had been learned in that time.

His eager eyes caught the every flicker of their bodies, the every tread of their step, the every thought of their minds. They were strange beings indeed. Their minds were never at rest. They could not send silent thoughts and they seemed to struggle in the cages of their bodies to communicate.

Occasionally one would move its mouth at the other, and a fraction of the real communication would be understood.

There was a wandering in them. They were never at rest. Their lives were meshes of step and run and scamper. Never at peace, never at rest, always driven on, always driven on . . .

*Father, the thought blossomed. I want to follow them, I want to listen more to them.*

Thought returned: *Be careful, my son.*

They captured him in the village. They had been studying the thatchy hutches, when the First Mate caught the movement of his green fur from the corner of his eye. They had closed in carefully. Wummel scampered away, but the enmeshing action of the power-driven elasticord in their guns trapped him.

He lay still, as they picked him up, wrapped into a small furry ball, with the adhesive elasticord wound about him in many twistings. They carried him out of the forest, and laid him before the First Mate.

He lay still as they surrounded him. He stared up out of saucer-sized yellow eyes, and the green smooth fur of his flanks quivered under their gaze.

"Is it animal, vegetable, or . . ." one of the non-coms began, but the First Mate cut him off with a wave of the hand.

"Do you feel anything?"

The others shook their heads, but the First noticed one man whose eyes had clouded, whose brow was furrowed with lines of concentration. As though he were

listening for a sound, far off.

"Queer lookin' little thing," one of the men said. "Wonder what it eats. Or if *we* can eat it!" He began to chuckle.

The First cut him off hard.

"Shut up!" His face had an odd shine to it, as though a thin film of perspiration was about to break through.

"I—I—" the words only half-formed.

He knew what he wanted to say, but he could not. The thing before him was a beast of the woods; a dumb thing with neither mind nor manner. Still, he felt it was *speaking to him*.

Strange words with a strange tone. Words and thoughts of a million years. The thoughts of an entire race; a race that had never left its world, had never climbed from the dirt, and yet was sublimely happy. Tied to its world; at peace with the universe.

The First Mate had been in space eighteen years. He had grown hard fighting for the Mapping Command, and it had been many more years than he could remember since he had cried.

But he felt the tears beginning. The thoughts were so sweet, so clear, so demanding in their picturing.

"Take him to the ship," he

said, turning toward the forest. "We'll let the Captain have a look at him."

The men lifted Wummel and carried him back through the foliage.

The First Mate followed a few feet behind, his head lowered.

They wanted to take Wummel to Earth.

He could hear them saying it in the caverns of their minds. The thought came strongest from the man they called the Captain. He thought, and the thoughts came to Wummel, and Wummel listened.

*To Earth the thought said. To Earth, and the Command is saved. To Earth and then we can go off across the Rim and find the last planet ever.*

Wummel knew these were lower thoughts; buried deeper than the fibers knew. Buried down where this Captain could never really see them, only feel the burning of their message. And he always moved without rest.

Constantly driven on, with no sleep, toward no ending. Wummel felt the heart in him go out to these strange beasts of the eternally nighted sky. They were terrible in their everlasting wandering. Even their home world

was to them merely a base to which they could return.

Now they wanted to take him from *his* home.

Wummel considered it, the chill spreading up from his feet. He knew he was as deeply rooted to Ruska as the sewlan or the gnarl-bushes. Could it be conceivable that he might go, and never return?

Wummel found it difficult to live in his world. The land-beasts were huge, hungry and fearsome. The prowlcats and the sytazill were always on the hunt, and Wummel's people had never quite learned to avoid them. For the land-beasts were not precisely ignorant brutes. They had minds, and souls, and their actions could not always be predicted.

Then, too, there was the sucking valley, where the mud ran up over the walls of the canyon and dragged down those unlucky enough to be blown there during the Time of Winds. There were many things that made life hard for the Ruskind. But it was good, too.

It was good when the triple moons rose in blue and fire-red and white. When the coolness came. When the long magenta blossoms of the

also broke forth and shot many feet into the air, showing all the hills till they were carpeted bright and happy with the color. And most of all, Wummel loved the sighing, whispering, chortling winds that blew to him from beyond the mountains. He had often wanted to go there, beyond the stark black mountains, and see the Wind Lord who made the happy puffs that became the wind.

They wanted to take him from all that and send him hurtling through a black so deep that no man, no Ruskinda, would ever see to its far end.

He knew of the stars. He had seen them. His people spoke of them. But not to go there. Never that!

They wanted to cast him from his home and set him wandering on that star-road that twisted and wound in among the eternal graves of the beings that had wandered to their deaths.

Tears, thick and oily, arose in Wummel's eyes, even as the Earthmen let the big plug-door sigh shut, blocking away the light of Ruska. He felt the shivering and roaring, the hungry urgency of the metal itself, as the ship thundered its desire to go.

Never to stop again on this world of the three moons of the blue, blue seas, of the razor-toothed mountains, and the winds blowing from beyond those mountains.

The take-off was a sloppy one. Somehow the tapes had been fed in with a bit too much urgency, as though the Drivemaster had wanted away from the tiny world.

Captain Kovasic stood with his back to the little cage; watching through the viewport as the multi-colored world dropped away under them; until it was a picture drawn on a blackboard.

He felt the thoughts bubbling up in him, and turned, reluctantly. He stared at the little green creature, huddled into a ball, its huge eyes staring. The creature was shivering, mocking the quivers of the ship itself. Kovasic felt that had the being possessed eyelids, it would surely have had them screwed tightly, painfully shut.

The thoughts roiled and swirled, like dirty oil on an angry sea, and he felt the rising of his own longing in his throat. A longing he had never actually known he possessed.

He knew, with a startling burst of clarity, the writing

in the Book of the Ancestors. He knew of the Ruskind and of the roots that grow deeper, far deeper, than the mere roots of race. He knew he was a wanderer, that all his people were wanderers, and how they would end. He knew, too, what he had done to Wummel.

He watched as the little creature's golden eyes frosted over as its fur ceased quivering.

The First Mate had not wanted to come to the bridge. He had known the creature was there, and he had not relished the ideas and disturbing thoughts the being seemed to create.

But he came, because he knew the progress report must be delivered. At all times the Captain must know how far they had come, how fast they were going, how soon they would arrive.

All the information of running.

When he stepped onto the bridge, he saw only the Captain's back, and the blind, blank face of the viewport. The Captain had blacked it out. Space was cut off for the first time since the ship had been launched.

"Captain . . . ?" His voice was a softness, as though the

fragile glass and spiderweb of the silence hanging between them might shatter.

"It died," Kovasic said, staring straight ahead into nowhere.

"Died? The specimen? How? What could have . . . ?"

"It couldn't live away from the planet. We broke its heart. It's that simple; laugh if you want—breaking its heart—but it died, that's all. And now we'll go home. Home." He said the last word with an odd, thick sound. As though it had been something he had known so very long ago but had forgotten. Now, suddenly, he had remembered it and knew he was damned because it was too late.

"The Command. It will be swallowed by the mercantile!"

The Captain whirled, his face half-angry, half-imploring. "Don't you understand, Charlie? Don't you know? You ran away from the creature, you must have heard what it said. Don't you see? The Command, the mercantile guilds, Earth, the searching, the always hungering for more, more, more, more . . ."

He stopped as though searching for words, then said the one thing that *did*

matter. He said it knowing he was sounding the one truth that was inescapable. The one truth that Wummel had died because he had been deprived of a home.

"There is no home, if there is no rest. There is no rest if there is no *Home*."

Then he turned back to the viewport. The First Mate moved to leave, but the soft

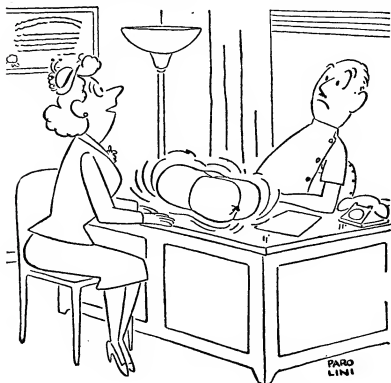
words of the Captain, spoken against the deadened surface, stopped all movement. Staring at the empty surface, he murmured.

"It died, and the last thing it felt . . ." he paused.

"It pitied us, Charlie. That's all. It didn't hate us for killing it.

"It just pitied us."

THE END



"I wish you'd talk to my husband, Doctor.  
He's just a bundle of nerves."



# RELUCTANT GENIUS

By O. H. LESLIE

*It is said that Life crawled up from the slime of the sea-bottoms and became Man because of inherent greatness bred into him before the dawn of time. But perhaps this urge was not as formless as we think.*

BUOS was chastising Laloi as they sped through the ionosphere of the green planet. But like the airy creature she was, Laloi ignored the criticism and rippled zephyr-like through a clump of daffodils when they completed their descent.

"So pretty," she sighed. She flung her incorporeal substance around each flower, absorbing their unified

beauty of scent, sight, and feel. Buos shrilled himself into a column of wind to express his displeasure at her attitude.

"Stupid, silly, shallow thing!" he said. "If the others only knew how you behaved—"

"And you'll be glad to tell them, of course," she said, extending her fingers of air into the roots of the wind-

bent grass. She rolled across the hill ecstatically, and Buos followed in grumbling billows of energy.

"I don't carry tales," he replied, somewhat mortified. "But we're here as observers, and you insist upon making this world a plaything . . ."

"I love it," she said happily. "It's so warm and green."

Buos whipped in front of her angrily. "This is an assignment," he snapped, his emotion crackling the air about him. "We have a purpose here."

"Purpose!" she groaned, settling over a patch of crowded clover. "How many centuries will this assignment last?"

"This world is young," said Buos. "It will take time."

"But how long?" she asked mournfully. "Our world will be shrivelled and dead before these people have the knowledge to rescue us. Why can't we spend our lives here . . ."

"And leave the others behind?" said Buos stiffly. "Selfish being," he said sadly. "This world cannot support one-fourth our number."

"Oh, I know, I know," Laloi said. "I do not mean to say such things. I am twisted

by my sorrow . . ." As if to express her self-abnegation, she corkscrewed out of the clover and into a thin spiral of near-nothingness.

"Settle down, foolish one," said Buos, not unkindly. "I know your feelings. Do you think I am not tormented as well, by the slow pace of these Earth-things? Crude, barbaric beings, like children with the building blocks of science. They have such a long way to go . . ."

"And so few *know*," said Laloi despairingly. "A handful of seeing minds, tens of millions of ignorant ones. Not even first principles—they're stupid, stupid!"

"But they will learn," Buos said stubbornly. "That is historical fact. Someday, they will know the true meanings of matter and light and energy. Slowly, yes, slowly. But in terms of their growth, it will seem like great speed to them . . ."

"And in terms of our world," said Laloi, spinning sadly over the ground, "they may be far too late . . ."

"No!" In his excitement, Buos forgot himself and entwined with the flowing form of the she-creature, and the result was a rending of the air that cracked like heat



lightning over the field. "No," he repeated again. "They must not be too late. They must learn. They must build from the very ground, and then they must fly. And then their eyes must be lifted to the stars, and desire must extend them to all the universe . . ."

"It seems so hopeless—"

"It cannot be! Our destiny is not extinction. They must come to us, in fleets of silver, and replant our soil, and send towers of green shooting into our sky, breathing out air."

"Yes, yes!" Laloi cried pitifully. "It will be that way, Buos. It will be that way! That man-creature, we will begin with him . . ."

Buos floated earthward disconsolately. "He is a dreamer," he said cheerlessly. "His mind is good; he thinks of tomorrow; he is one of the knowing ones. But he cannot be moved, Laloi. His thoughts may fester and die in the prison of his brain . . ."

"No, they will not! We have watched him. He understands much. He will help us!"

"I have seen his like before," said Buos hopelessly. "He thinks and he works, and his conclusions will die still-born for lack of a moving force . . ."

"Then let us provide it, Buos. Let us move him!"

"With what?" said the other disdainfully. "Arms of nothing? Hands of vacuum? A breeze against his cheek? A rustle of leaves? A meaningless whistle in his ear?"

"Let us try. Let us try! This empty watchfulness is destroying us. Let us move him, Buos. Come!"

Faster than the sky-sweeping clouds they flew, over the gently-swelling hills, over the yearning branches of the trees, over the calm blue waters of the lakes. Swifter than the flight of birds they came, searching for a thinking mind . . .

They found him at last.

"He knows, he knows," said Laloi. "Only now to say 'this is so because' and 'this must happen when'! Only to think—to understand—"

They hovered over his head, in a pandemonium of helplessness. They whirled, and tumbled, and shrilly circled. And then to Laloi the inspiration came.

The apple, caught by a sudden gust of wind, twisted from the tenuous hold of the tree and fell to the ground.

The man, startled, picked it up.

He gazed at it, deep in thought.

**THE END**

# HEART

By HENRY SLESAR

*Monk had three questions he lived by: Where can I find it? How much will it cost? When can you deliver? But now they said that what he needed wasn't for sale. "Want to bet?" He snorted.*

**S**YSTOLE . . . diastole . . . the Cardiophone listened, hummed, and recorded; tracing a path of perilous peaks and precipices on the white paper.

"Relax!" Dr. Rostov pleaded. "Please relax, Mr. Monk!"

The eyes of Fletcher Monk replied. Rostov knew their language well enough to read the glaring messages they transmitted. Indignation . . . "Don't use that commanding tone with me, Doctor!" Protest . . . "I am relaxed; completely relaxed!" Warning . . . "Get me out of this electric chair, Rostov!"

The physician sighed and clicked the apparatus off. Swiftly, but with knowing fingers, he disengaged his patient from the wire and rubber encumbrances of the

reclining seat. Fletcher Monk sat up and rubbed his forearms, watching every movement the doctor made as he prepared to study the results of his examination.

"You're fussing, Rostov," he said coldly. "My shirt."

"In a moment."

"Now," said Monk impatiently.

The physician shook his head sadly. He handed Monk his shirt and waited until the big man had buttoned it half way down. Then he returned to the Cardiophone for a more critical study. A fine analysis was hardly necessary; the alarming story had been told with the first measurements of the heart machine.

"Cut it out," said Monk brusquely. "You've got that



Money buys anything, I tell you—anything!

death's-head look again, Rostov. If you want to say something, say it."

"You were tight as a drum," said the doctor. "That's going to influence my findings, you know. If you hadn't refused the narcotic—"

Fletcher Monk barked: "I won't be drugged!"

"It would have relaxed you—"

"I was as relaxed as I ever am," the other man said candidly, and Rostov recognized the truth of his analysis. Monk lived in a world of taut muscles and nerves stretched out just below the breaking point. Tenseness was his trademark; there was no more elasticity in Monk's body than there was in the hard cash he accumulated so readily.

"Well?" the patient jeered. "What's the verdict, you damned sawbones? Going to throw away my cigars? Going to send me on a long sea voyage?"

Rostov frowned.

"Don't look so smug!" Monk exploded. "I know you think there's something wrong with me. You can't wait to bury me!"

"You're sick, Mr. Monk," said the doctor. "You're very sick."

Monk glowered. "You're wrong," he said icily. "You've made a lousy diagnosis."

"What was that feeling you described?" asked Rostov. "Remember what you told me? Like a big, black bird, flapping its wings in your chest. Didn't that mean something to you, Mr. Monk?"

The industrialist paled. "All right. Get to the point," he said quietly. "What did that gadget tell you?"

"Bad news," said the doctor. "Your heart's been strained almost to bursting. It's working on will power, Mr. Monk; hardly anything else."

"*Get to the point!*" Monk shouted.

"That *is* the point," Rostov said stiffly. "You have a serious heart condition. A dangerous condition. You've ignored eight years of my advice, and now your heart is showing the effects."

"What can it do to me?"

"Kill you," said the doctor bluntly. "Frankly, I can't even promise that the usual precautions will do any good. But we have no other choice than to take them. The human body is a miraculous affair, and even the most desperate damages sometimes

can't prevent it from going on living. But I won't mince words with you, Mr. Monk. You're a direct sort of person, so I'm telling you directly. Your chances are slim."

Monk sat down and put his black tie on distractedly. He sat deep in thought for a while, and then said:

"How much would it cost to fix it?"

"What?"

"Money!" the big man cried. "How much money would it take to get me repaired?"

"But it's not a matter of money—"

"Don't give me that!" Monk put his jacket on with a violent motion. "I've learned better than that in my fifty years, Dr. Rostov. Money fixes everything. Everything! I could curdle your milk by telling you some of the things I've fixed with money!"

The physician shrugged. "Money doesn't buy health."

"Doesn't it?" The patient gave an abrupt laugh. "Money buys people, Dr. Rostov. It buys loyalty and disloyalty. It buys friends and sells enemies. All these are commodities, Doctor. I found that out—the hard way."

"Mr. Monk, you don't

know what I'm telling you. Your heart action is unreliable, and no amount of dollars can bring it back to normal—"

The industrialist stood up. "You think the heart is incorruptible, eh?" He snorted. "Well, I think different. Someplace on earth there's a man or a method that can fix me up. It'll take money to find the answer, that's for sure. But I'll find it!"

Rostov put out his hand helplessly. "You're being unreasonable, Mr. Monk. There is nothing on earth—"

"*All right!*" Fletcher Monk shouted. "So maybe there's nothing on Earth!" His body trembled with his emotion. "Then I'll go to the stars, if I have to!"

Rostov started. "If you mean this gravity business—"

"What's that?" Monk froze. "What's that you said?"

"This gravity thing," the doctor said. "This silly story about the Mars Colony they've been spreading—"

"What silly story?" asked Monk, narrowing his eyes. "I haven't heard it. What do you mean?"

Rostov regretted his words. But he knew it was too late

to stop the industrialist from extracting the details from him. He made a despairing gesture and went over to his desk. From the top drawer, he withdrew a folded sheet torn from the pages of a daily newspaper that specialized in lurid articles and wild imaginings.

Monk snatched it from the doctor's hand. "Let me see that!" he said. He turned the paper over in his hand until he found the red-pencilled article the doctor had referred to.

"MARS BOON TO HEART CASES, SAYS SPACE DOCTOR." Monk read the headline aloud, and then looked at Rostov.

"It's a misquotation," the physician said. "Dr. Feasley never made such a bald statement. They've taken something out of context to make a sensational story—"

"Let me see for myself," snapped Monk.

He began to read. "... 'Space Medicine Association ... Dr. Samuel Feasley, renowned' ... here it is! ... 'the effects of Earth's gravitational pull on the body versus the relatively light gravitation encountered by the members of the Martian Colony ... two-fifths the pull

of earth ... interesting speculation on the heart action ... !'" He crushed the paper in his hands. "By God!" he cried. "Here's my answer, you gloomy old fool!"

"No, no!" said Rostov hurriedly. "You don't know what you're saying—"

Fletcher Monk laughed loudly. "I always know what I'm saying, Doctor Rostov. Here it is in black and white! Why should I die on Earth—when I can live on Mars?"

"But it's impossible! There are so many problems—"

"Money solves problems!"

"Not this one!" said the doctor heatedly. "Not the problem of acceleration! You'll never reach Mars alive!"

Monk paused. "What do you mean?" he blinked.

"The acceleration will kill you!" Rostov said in a shaking voice. "Three G's are enough to burst that sick heart of yours. And the acceleration reaches a gravity of *nine* at one point. You'd never make it!"

"I'll never make it *here*," said Monk, biting out the words. "You told me that yourself."

"At least there's a chance," the doctor argued. "A slim one, surely. But you're talk-

ing about almost certain death!"

"How do you know?" said Monk contemptuously. "You've never had anything to do with space medicine. You're what they call a groundworm, Doc. Just like me."

"You'll never even get aboard a spaceship. There's a rigid physical examination required. You couldn't pass it in a million years! It's suicide to think of it."

Monk paced the floor. "But if I did pass it—"

"Impossible!"

"But if I *did*," Monk insisted. "Would my chances for living be better on Mars?"

"I suppose so. Your heart wouldn't have to work nearly so hard. You'd weigh less than ninety pounds . . ."

"Then it's worth a try, isn't it?" He grasped the physician by the shoulders and shook him. "Isn't it?" he shouted.

"Mr. Monk, I can't let you even consider it!"

"You can't?" Monk looked at him threateningly. "Are you dictating my affairs now, Doctor? Are you forgetting who I am?"

"The Mars Colony is a working organization," the

doctor said, desperately. "The life there is hard, rugged—"

"*Hard?*" Monk roared. "Hardness and Monk are synonymous words, Doctor Rostov. Don't you read the papers? Don't you know what they call me? The Iron Millionaire!" He laughed. "And there's something else you're not aware of. I own a lot of this country. But I also own a good piece of the Mars Colony. Just let 'em try and stop me!"

Rostov threw his hands in the air. "You're completely off balance, Mr. Monk. What you're thinking about is impossible in a dozen different ways. But I'm not going to worry about it. You'll never get near a space vessel—"

"That remains to be seen," said Monk.

"The best thing for you," the doctor continued, "is to start slowing down—right now, today. And the first project we have to work on is the loss of some thirty or forty pounds. You're much too heavy for that heart of yours."

Monk didn't appear to be listening. Thoughtfully, he reached inside his coat and brought out a long black cigar. He bit off the end and spat it out onto the polished floor of the examining room.

"You'll have to lose those, too," the doctor cautioned. "Cigars are out."

Fletcher Monk jammed the cigar between his teeth. He looked at the doctor and smiled grimly.

"O.K., Doc," he said. "I'm going to follow your advice. And the first thing I'm going to arrange is the loss of some weight." He lit the cigar and puffed heavily. "About a hundred and thirty pounds," he said.

Monk put his hat on his head and walked out. He felt better already.

Monk found his informant in the person of a Spacelane employee named Horner. Garcia, the converted hood that now "assisted" Monk in his personal affairs, brought the Spacelane man into the industrialist's office and gestured him into a chair.

"All right," said Monk. "Garcia's told you what I want. Now let's go." He picked up a paper from his desk, and began to read off the list of typewritten names.

"Houston," he said.

"No good," said Horner. "He's the dispatch officer. Crusty old guy. Spent eleven years in space, and he's plenty mean."

"I don't care about his dis-

position," said Monk testily. "Can he be bought?"

Horner shook his head. "I doubt it."

"All right, then." Monk rattled the paper. "How about Roth?"

"Uh-uh. He's the Chief Medical Officer. Very Army. He helped draft the original physical standards for space flight."

"Davis!" said Monk.

"Well . . ." Horner looked pensive. "He doesn't mind a fast buck now and then. But he's only a Supplies Officer. He couldn't do anything about smuggling you aboard."

"Christy."

"Don't know much about Christy. He's a pilot, and pretty close-mouthed. Spends most of his time between trips in the bosom of his family, so to speak. Which is maybe understandable, because he's got a wife that is absolutely—"

"Skip that junk," said Garcia toughly. "The boss wants facts."

"Keep out of this, you," said Monk. He smiled humorlessly at Horner. "What about Christy's wife?"

"Well, she's—I mean, she's a looker, understand? A real beauty. Only from what I heard around the base, she's



a groundworm's delight, if you know what I mean—"

"I don't know what you mean," said Monk patiently.

"Well, with her husband away six months out of every year, and a swell-lookin' doll like that . . . Figure it out for yourself."

Monk grunted. "I'll keep it in mind," he said. "Now how about this fellow Forsch?"

"Maybe there's something there," said Horner. "He's a doctor, too. Handles most of the routine physicals. But I heard a rumor about some pretty unethical practices he was mixed up in before he took this job. There may be nothing to it, but if you could look into it—"

"I will," said Monk abruptly. He handed the paper over to the Spacelane employee. "Anybody else here you want to tell me about?"

Horner looked over the list.

"That's about it, I guess," he said. "Nobody here can do you any good. But you look into this guy Forsch. He may be your boy."

Monk smiled tightly.

"Pay him," he said, to Garcia.

When the detectives handed Fletcher Monk the completed report on the activities

of Diana Christy, he read it through thoroughly, savoring each juicy word between puffs of his cigar. The report was excellently constructed. It was painstaking in its detail. It named names, places, times, events, and even recorded certain revealing conversations. It gave the background of each of Mrs. Christy's lovers, even down to their income and place of birth.

It was a marvelous document, in Monk's estimation, and not the first of its kind he had had prepared. A powerful piece of persuasion.

With great satisfaction, he replaced the volume in an envelope and buzzed for Garcia. His instructions to the assistant were crisp and definite. The assignment was the kind that Garcia both understood and relished. He took the report from Monk's hands and went on his way to call on the lady in question.

Bill Christy, recently returned from a Mars flight, was both amazed and disturbed by the strange request his beautiful young wife made of him. It was awful—illegal—even criminal! To arrange for the certification of a man with a weak heart; to virtually counterfeit the

medical records of the Space-lane Company!

But he *was* her uncle, Diana Christy pleaded. The only relative she had in the world; the only one she loved outside of Christy himself. He *must* help her; he must give her poor sick uncle a chance to make a new life for himself in the Mars Colony.

He wouldn't do it; he couldn't! But she cried, with great wet tears streaming down the smooth planes of her face. Didn't he love her? Wasn't this one little favor worth doing for the sake of her happiness? No one would be hurt by it. The motives were altruistic, after all.

But the risk—

There wasn't any risk, she assured him. Her uncle was wealthy; very wealthy. He could supply all the money Bill would need. If what people said about Dr. Forsch was true, he might be approached. That would make it simple, wouldn't it? It was such a small thing he could do—but how she would appreciate it! How she would love him for it!

And of course, finally, with her cool arms about his neck and her soft cheek pressed against his, he replied:

"I'll do it."

Monk handed his luggage to the official at the Space-lane Flight Desk. But he kept the brown leather bag in his hand, and no amount of argument could separate him from it. It was easy to understand his devotion to this particular piece of personal property; it contained some four million dollars in cash.

"I may not be the youngest man on Mars," he smiled to himself as he walked onto the loading platform. "But I'll be the richest!"

Aboard the ship, the pilot Bill Christy gave him a worried glance and assisted him into the contour chair. Christy showed concern.

"You feel okay, Mr. Wheeler?" he asked. Monk smiled back, but not in answer to the question. He enjoyed the pseudonym, because it was the name of an old competitor, long-since buried beneath Monk's superior talents in the business of making money.

"Try and relax as much as you can," said Christy. "We'll give you a mild sedative before blast-off. Remember, there are going to be distinct variations in the G forces as we accelerate, so

try to remember the breathing instructions."

"I will," said Monk. "Once more, though—"

"There'll be a steady build-up of acceleration for about ninety seconds. We'll go rapidly from zero gravity to nine. Breathe deeply and regularly on the way up. Then, when you feel a normal amount of pressure, hold your breath. Don't let it out until you feel the G forces increase again."

"I understand," Monk nodded.

"We'll get up to a peak of 8 G's, and hold that for about two minutes. Do the same thing—hold your breath when we start accelerating once more. It'll be easy after that."

The pilot made a final check of Monk's G suit and straps. Then he clapped the industrialist on the shoulder and strode off.

Twenty minutes later, when they were ready for blast-off, a warning bell sounded throughout the ship.

With a deafening roar of its rocket motors, the great vessel lifted itself laboriously from the ground, squatting on flame, filling Fletcher Monk's mind with the first real sense of fear since he

learned the grim facts of his ailment in Rostov's office.

Then the acceleration began, and in less than a minute, Monk knew a taste of Hell.

His vision blurred as the crushing force of naked speed pasted him against the contour seat. Consciousness began to leave him, but not soon enough. For there, in the tortured imaginings of his pain-constricted brain, came the ugly black bird again, shrieking horribly and perching itself on his chest. Its huge claws raked his ribs, and its dripping beak fastened itself on his throat. Now he recognized the species for what it was: a vulture, a bird of prey, unwilling to be robbed of its Earth victim; trying to pinion him to the planet with the strength of its anger. Its great wings flapped, flapped, flapped, beating against his body, flooding it with unrelieved anguish—

Then Monk gasped.

Gone! The bird was gone! A moment's peace, a moment's peace, a moment's freedom from torment—

No! The vulture returned, bent on its evil purpose. It wouldn't be denied; it raked its razor-sharp claws across Monk's shoulder; dug its

beak into his chest; flapping, flapping—

Fletcher Monk screamed.

He opened his eyes, admitted a rush of clean air gratefully into his lungs.

"It's a miracle," said Bill Christy. "Nothing more. You were in a bad way, Mr. Wheeler, but you'll be okay now."

"Thank you, thank you!" panted Fletcher Monk.

"We're well on our way now. We'll reach the Big Bird in a matter of minutes—"

"The Big Bird?" said Monk in horror.

Christy smiled. "That's what we call the Space Station. We'll pick up some supplies and fuel there, and then we'll take off again. But you won't have to be concerned about the acceleration on the second blast-off. You can take that easily."

"Are you sure?" said Monk anxiously.

"Positive. There won't be any gravitational pull to overcome this time. You'll be fine."

"I appreciate this, Christy. I won't forget your help."

"That's okay, Mr. Wheeler. It makes my wife happy."

"Yes." Monk felt well enough now to give the pilot

a sardonic smile. "She's a wonderful girl, Diana. A wonderful girl."

"You're telling me?" said Bill Christy.

The space suit that Fletcher Monk had been assigned before the descent on Mars was a little tight-fitting for his comfort. He wondered what life would be like in this eternal bulky costume. But he was comforted by the picture of the Mars Colony he had received back on Earth; a labyrinth of airtight interiors, burrowing their way over and into the planet, served by gigantic oxygen tanks. The network of buildings had been expanding every year, until now it covered some hundred miles of the planet's surface. He'd spend most of his time safely indoors, he promised himself, where he wouldn't need the cumbersome trappings of space clothing. His life had been an indoor affair anyway, back on Earth.

The passengers were led into the Quarantine Section, where they would spend their first three days on Mars.

It was a relief to Monk to shed the heavy space-suit in the air-filled room. And it was a revelation, for with helmet and boots removed,

he found himself almost floating with each step he took, moving feather-light over the ground. He was surprised, and a little unnerved at first, but then he remembered that this feeble gravitation was the preserver of his health—and he laughed aloud.

"Something funny?" said the man at the front desk. He was a young man, about thirty, but there was an ageless competence in his features.

Monk smiled. "Just feeling good, that's all." He patted the brown leather bag in his hand.

"Name?"

"Well, it will be listed as Wheeler . . ."

The official scanned the list. "Here it is. Ben Wheeler." He looked up at Monk curiously. "How old are you, Mr. Wheeler?"

"Fifty," said Monk.

"Pretty old for the Colony, aren't you, Mr. Wheeler?"

Monk smirked. "The first thing we have to do is get rid of that Wheeler business, young man. My name is Monk. Fletcher Monk."

The official looked puzzled. "I don't get it. Why the phoney name?"

"I used an alias for reasons of my own. Now I'm

telling you my real name. Monk."

The man shrugged and wrote something on the manifest.

"I don't expect you to cheer," said Monk sarcastically. "But you could show some reaction."

"What does that mean?"

Monk flushed. "Don't tell me you've never heard of me. I'm *Fletcher Monk*. I own half of this place."

"So?"

"What do you mean 'so'? My firm controls thirty percent of the mineral rights of the Colony. We ship you practically all of your Earth supplies. We can buy or sell this place at the drop of a quotation!"

"Listen, bud." The young man seemed annoyed. "If you're trying to impress me, forget it. And if you're threatening my job, you can take it!"

"Insolence!" Monk raged. "Who's your commanding officer? I want to see him right away!"

"My pleasure," the official grinned. "Hey, Gregorio!" he called to the man at the desk behind him. "Call Captain Moore. Gentleman here wants a word with him."

Monk took a seat while

the other passengers went through the initial formalities. He sat there, fuming, until a tall man with an untrimmed beard entered the room. He took off his helmet and spoke briefly to the young man at the front desk, then looked over at Monk and came to his side.

"Mr. Monk?" he said. "I'm Captain Moore."

"Nice to meet you, Captain. I've just had a little conversation with your official greeter." He smiled, man-to-man. "Not a very friendly chap."

"We forget a lot about manners up here," said the captain, not smiling back. "We're kept pretty busy."

"I realize that, of course," said the industrialist. "But I would expect a little common courtesy—"

"You'll *earn* the right to courtesy out here, Mr. Monk," the captain snapped. "The Mars Colony lives on labor, and that's our first consideration. Courtesy comes about last on our list. We're in a battle here, twenty-four hours and thirty-seven minutes a day. We've got to fight to keep alive, and we've got to wrestle with a whole new planet if we want to unearth its se-

crets. Courtesy is a distinct privilege on Mars, Mr. Monk."

Monk bristled. "I don't quite get your meaning, Captain," he said indignantly. "But don't expect to pull rank or a holy attitude on me. In case you didn't realize it, I'm in a position to exert a great deal of influence over your little colony — and don't think I won't use it!"

The captain shrugged. "Use it," he said. "Go on. See if your influence really holds up here. Remember, Mr. Monk—you came to us of your own volition, and you can always turn around and go back."

"Impossible," said Monk, blanching. "I'm going to live here—for good."

"Then you'll have to adjust to *our* way," said the captain grimly. "You'll have to learn our way of doing things and cooperate a hundred percent. And the first thing you'll have to do is take a work assignment—"

"Work?" Monk gasped. "Why should I? You can't force me to work for you—"

"Remember Captain John Smith, Mr. Monk? He said the same thing to his colonists that I'm going to say to you now. If you don't work—you don't eat."

"But what could I do? I'm no scientist. I'm no—"

"There's plenty to do," the captain interrupted. "And most of it is dirty, physical labor. We have a thousand minerologists, chemists, geologists, botanists, physicists, meteorologists, and a lot more technical people at work on this planet. They can use all the help they can get. Don't worry about that!"

"But I'm *Fletcher Monk!*" the industrialist said. "I won't go grubbing around this filthy place! You can't enslave me like some chain-gang prisoner—"

"You'll do what you have to do," said the captain, "and you'll probably even like it. There's a wonderland outside this door," he said enthusiastically. "A crazy, wild, improbable wonderland, where we never see a rain-fall, where the plants grow scarlet, and clouds chase you down the street! We're uncovering marvelous things here. We have to fight and sometimes die to do it, but frankly, we enjoy the work."

He gave Monk his first smile. "Nobody's a prisoner on Mars, Mr. Monk. We're all volunteers."

He started to leave, but Monk stopped him.

"Wait," he said, licking his lips. "I have one more thing to say." He lowered his voice. "I can make a deal with you, Captain. A deal like you never had in your whole life." He patted the brown leather bag. "Name your price," he said. "And don't be shy about the figure."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I'm talking about, Mr. Moore. Money. Real, hard, Earth dollars. Just name the amount it would take to buy a few small creature comforts around this place—and the right to live my own life."

"You can't buy your way out of working, mister—"

"Don't give me that! You'll sing a different tune when I tell you how much is in this bag. All you have to do is quote a figure—and it's yours!"

"Sorry, Mr. Monk," said the captain tersely.

"What do you mean by *sorry?*"

"I'm on a lifetime assignment here, and so are practically all the members of the Colony. It's a job that can barely be completed in a lifetime. And the economy we operate under doesn't call for money. Your dollars are so

much excess baggage on Mars."

"What are you talking about?" Monk rasped. "I'm offering you a fortune. Money is money, you fool!"

"You can paper the walls of your quarters with it," said the officer sharply. "See if it helps keep out the Martian cold. That's about all the usefulness it has up here."

Wildly, Fletcher Monk unlocked the bag and dipped inside. His hand came out with a fistfull of green bills. "Look!" he cried. "I'm not joking about this! Look at it! Doesn't the sight of it mean anything to you?"

"It brings back some memories," said the captain smiling. "That's about all. Now you better go back to the desk and get your quarantine instructions."

He saluted the industrialist casually, and turned away.

"Okay, Mr. Moneybags," said the young official as the captain left. "Let's get acquainted."

A year later, Captain Harlan Moore presided at the dedication of the first fully-equipped hospital erected on the planet Mars. It was an impressive affair, despite the fact that it took place in a

small, crowded chamber, and that the attending assemblage were still begrimed by their day's work.

When the ceremonies were completed, Captain Moore made an inspection of the new medical center, and one of his first stops was the bedside of Fletcher Monk.

"We knew he wasn't a well man," said the young physician who stood by the bed, taking Monk's pulse. He watched as the captain picked up the chart hooked to the edge of the bed.

"Yes," said Moore. "He was a very sick man when he first came to the Colony. In more ways than one," he added.

The doctor looked perplexed. "But this illness still surprises me," he said. "I've examined him almost monthly for the past year, and frankly, I would have bet on his survival. He began to improve rapidly — physically, anyway. It might have been the lesser gravity, or the healthier life." He looked at the captain curiously. "Yet he wasn't assigned to any over-strenuous duties?"

"You know he wasn't," said the captain. "We don't want anybody to undertake work they can't handle. His labor was hardly physical.



He worked in the geological and botanical groups, but not in the field. He did classifying and clerical work."

"Then that wouldn't account for the trouble—"

"Perhaps it does, in a way," The captain bent over the puffy, chalk-white face of the industrialist, listening to his shallow breathing. "He was never happy doing it. He had different ideas about himself than we did. He never understood what we were doing or why."

"It's the greatest mystery of them all," said the physician, shaking his head.

"What is?"

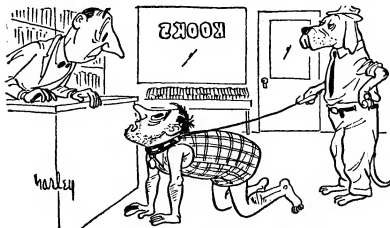
"The human body. It's incredible how much we've learned about the physical world, and even the physical

features of our own construction. But there's still a mystery we haven't penetrated—"

The captain smiled. "That doesn't sound like you."

"I know," the young physician answered. "But when I see a case like this—a man breathing his life away for a reason I really can't understand—" The doctor rubbed the back of his head. "I know it's crazy, and old-fashioned, and doesn't make the least bit of sense in these scientific times, Captain. But if anyone were to ask me—off the record, and completely unofficially—I could only give them one honest diagnosis of this case. I think this man is dying of a broken heart."

THE END



"What have you got on reincarnation?"

# BEFORE EGYPT

By E. K. JARVIS

*It was Mallison's strangest assignment. The weird little professor wanted to go to Egypt. That meant a trip back to Earth so far as Mallison was concerned. But the professor pointed to a distant star and Mallison wondered: "Who moved Egypt?"*

MIKE MALLISON and Nicko were in the office when the new clients entered. A girl and an elderly man. The girl smiled at Mike. Then she looked at Nicko and a sharp involuntary scream got past her lips.

"It's all right, lady," Mike said. "He won't hurt you. He never injures a client. Won't you sit down?"

Nicko wasn't offended. He was used to women reacting that way at first sight of him. In fact, the hideous little Martian misfit had caused even strong men to turn pale.

The elderly man was also



Jaws agape, the



hideous serpent hung poised above her slim thigh.

staring but with more clinical interest than horror. He turned his eyes on Mike and said, "I am Professor Arnold Brandon. This is my daughter, Doree."

"I'm Mike Mallison." He indicated with a nod. "This is my assistant, Nicko."

Nicko grinned, thus barring his tusks and adding new hideousness to his face. He waved his four arms and said, "I'm delighted to make your acquaintances. I hope your trip to Outer Port was not too tiring."

Nicko's tones were bell-like—his diction perfect. The girl gasped. The man blinked, then turned again to Mike. "I hope you received our electrogram."

"Yes, but it was a little vague. It merely said you would arrive at Outer Port as of this date."

"Quite. We wish to charter your ship for a cruise."

Mike considered. The *Space Queen* was at liberty but he wasn't sure about these two. Other than the fact that the man was old, the girl gray-eyed, slim, and damned pretty, he knew nothing about them. They certainly didn't look like big game hunters.

"For what destination?"

Professor Brandon hesi-

tated. "Out toward Orion, sir."

"A man could cruise out toward Orion for the rest of his life and still not arrive at a destination. Could you be more specific?"

"There is a planet out there I wish to visit but at this time I'd rather discuss details other than its location."

"Such as—?"

"The cost is very important to us."

Doree Brandon spoke up. "My father holds the Chair of Ancient Cultures at Casa Blanca University, and educators, as you may know, are not very well paid. We've been saving for this trip for a long time—"

She faltered, somewhat embarrassed and Mike asked, "In what segment of Orion is this planet located?"

"The ninth, sir."

Mike leaned forward. "May I assume your trip is of a scientific nature?"

"You may, sir."

"Then I wonder if you are familiar with the Terran Educational Foundation? I happened to have had contact with them some five years ago."

"I'm quite familiar with the organization."

"Did it occur to you that they might assume some of the cost of your trip?"

"They refused. They make the absurd claim that this planet I spoke of doesn't exist."

"But you have proof to the contrary?"

"An ancient document," Doree Brandon cut in. "A papyrus scroll. Father translated it."

"And the Foundation did not agree with his translation?"

"I did not submit the scroll. They know nothing about it."

"Father bought it from two men in Paris and worked three years on the translation." Doree looked at her father with great pride.

"My reasons for not submitting it were personal," Professor Brandon said, "and are not pertinent to this discussion."

"May I suggest," Mike said gently, "that a pair of crooks sold you a counterfeit—"

"You may not, sir!"

Doree reflected her father's indignation. "I'll have you know my father is the foremost authority in his field!"

Mike raised a protective hand. "All right—all right. I'm sorry."

"Then perhaps you'll tell us the approximate cost of the cruise?"

"I can haul you to the ninth segment and back for around seven thousand but that won't leave much leeway for search."

Professor Brandon beamed. "We can just about manage it. And I assure you very little search will be necessary."

"If you'll give me the planet's location I'll plot a course and give you an exact figure."

"It is not my intention to seem mysterious, but I'd prefer to give you that data after blast-off."

Mike scowled and half-rose from his chair. Professor Brandon hastily drew a pack of yellow bills from his pocket and laid it on the table. "There are four thousand. I have the rest at the hotel. We shall demonstrate complete faith in you by paying the seven thousand before we leave Outer Port."

With that he smiled and arose from his chair. "I guess that concludes our business at this time. We'll be at the hotel when you wish to contact us. Come Doree." He herded the girl out quickly and closed the door.

Nicko chuckled. "Smart old codger. He had you pegged dead to rights."

Mike turned his scowl on Nicko and snapped, "For Christ sake, speak Terran!"

Nicko had inadvertently used a Plutonian hill dialect he'd heard once, this being the hideous little Martian's amazing talent—an instinctive grasp of all tongues. His lingual talents were a tremendous asset to Mike but at times they drove him crazy because Nicko might absent-mindedly use several different tongues during a conversation; some of which he could not classify himself, having forgotten where he heard them.

"I said he had you pegged. He knew you were ready to turn him down so he upped with the mool. He knew once you touched the yellow you'd be his pup."

"I'm not so damned sure about that—"

Mike Mallison was a big game guide—a life he loved. He was a man of action and asked nothing better than the perils of his calling; the stalking of the great Plutonian ice bears; crouching in a Venusian swamp waiting for the ten-ton lizards to blow slime a hundred feet in the air and rise from their

lava-hot beds; matching wits with the telepathic Uranian rock wolves, the most elusive beast in the universe; setting his sights on a Martian jet-bat so some Terran millionaire could have a new trophy for his game room.

"You're not sure," Nicko was saying in Ganymedian French, "but you'll stay glued to the mool."

Mike was busy thinking and didn't ask for a translation. After all, he needed the money and if he didn't take it these two deluded characters would no doubt find someone who would.

"Besides," Nicko said in Terran, "the female's a dream. The legs—the torso—very nice to be in space with."

"Shut up! This is a business trip! Remember that. Exactly the same as though we were hauling a couple of fat Terran bankers."

"Sure. But that kitty's got more in the bank than—"

"Get the hell out of here! Go over to the Exchange and see if our new pile came in on that ship."

Outer Port was a man-made satellite artificially oxygenated and gravitated. It was the largest of a group assembled during the ex-

perimental period of the late twenty-first century. Later, methods of shifting asteroids and small planets into desired orbits were developed and the construction of space globes and platforms was discontinued.

At that time, the Interplanetary Guild of Space Guides purchased the satellite and moored it on the perimeter of the System to serve as a headquarters for their activities. They smashed a bottle of wine on it and christened it Outer Port after which every guide got drunk by way of celebration.

It was a bleak establishment. With no solar supplement, it lay in the eternal twilight of far space, the artificial heat of its surface rising against eternal cold thus causing a perpetual fogging of its atmosphere mixture.

So when the *Space Queen* blasted fifteen hours later, Doree Brandon brightened perceptibly. Professor Brandon remained in the lounge. Nicko was aft, watching the tube primers. Doree was with Mike in the control cabin.

"Getting used to Nicko?" Mike asked.

Doree smiled. "I owe him an apology. He is—" She

looked up suddenly. "He is *he*, isn't he?"

Mike laughed. "Nicko is male. Beyond that point he's hard to classify."

"That odd face! Those green scales! The four arms were a little difficult to get used to but now I think he's—well, kind of cute."

"Good for you."

"Where did you ever find him?"

"On Mars. I'll tell you about it sometime. Right now I've got to finish setting our primary course."

"I imagine you'd like the exact location of the planet as soon as possible."

"No great hurry. Any time in the next twelve hours will do. Just a matter of pinpointing the arc of the basic course. Your father didn't appear to feel too well when we blasted. How is he now?"

"He's been under a terrific strain. Perhaps we could let him rest awhile."

Mike turned on her sharply. "Listen—I'm going to ask you a straight question and I'd like a straight answer. Does that planet really exist?"

Her eyes widened, her head came up dangerously; and Mike noted this made her extremely attractive.

"Now wait a minute. Don't get sore. I'm not implying your father doesn't *believe* it's there. And after all, I've taken your money, so its a deal but—"

She almost smiled. "You just think that perhaps he's an impractical old dreamer with delusions."

"I didn't say that."

There was a pause while Doree evidently decided not to get angry. "I assure you, Mr. Mallison, I believe with all my heart that father's planet is exactly where he will direct you. Of course nothing is certain in this universe, but—"

Mike grinned and held out his hand. "I believe you. Accept my apology. And please call me Mike. We're going to see a lot of each other for a while."

She took his hand and smiled back. Their eyes held and Mike liked what he saw—pert elfin features; shining chestnut hair; even white teeth.

"We'll let your father rest a while," Mike said. "I'll get the figures from him later."

But he was fated never to get the location of the planet from the old scientist. In fact, he was never again to see Professor Brandon in

the confines of the *Space Queen*.

He finished setting primary course and then Nicko returned to report. "Everything grooved. Temp up. Color down. Tubes solid. Primers closed."

Nicko spoke in four languages. Doree, who understood two of them, gasped.

Nicko grinned. "Thought I was a mental void, eh, kitty? Why I can spit dialects you never heard of."

"Cut it out, Nicko. Treat our clients with a little more respect or I'll pry a few scales off your back."

"Okay, but those legs—that torso."

Mike whirled and Nicko bounced out of the cabin. "You've got to know him. He's completely loyal and he'd die ten times for any one of us. But he never learned tact."

"I don't know why you had to cut him off so abruptly." Doree was indignant.

It was Mike's turn to blink. "He was getting pretty personal—"

"I guess I know a compliment when I hear one, Mr. Mallison."

"Mike."

She grinned. "Okay—Mike. I'd like to see the ship when you've got time."



"I've got time now. Let's go."

They started at the prow and worked backwards. Her trip to Outer Port had been her first space flight, a fact that amazed Mike in this age when even the middle-class Terrans vacationed on Mars.

"We had so little time," Doree said. "And so' little money."

He explained the working of the *Space Queen*, enjoying the chore, and they worked their way slowly backward. Amidship, Doree said, "I think I'll look in on father."

She went below and almost immediately, Nick appeared at the after end of the companionway. "We've got company, Mike."

"What do you mean, company?"

"Ship winging to."

Mike scowled. "Out here? The radio hasn't spoken. Maybe they're in trouble and can't sound out."

He ran aft, Nicko stumping along behind. He looked out the stern port. A ship all right. A slim cruiser of the D class, the light of faraway suns reflecting against its hull, giving it the ghostly appearance of all craft in space.

"Ever see that ship before?" Mike asked.

"Not me. I'll bet my right

top arm it never moored at Outer Port. If it had we'd know the boat."

"Lots of ships never moored at Outer Port. Go forward and see if you can speak to them. Maybe they can sound in."

Nicko left and Mike watched the ship arc closer. Mike admired the skill of the pilot, then realized the ship was on complete automatic, taking its impulses from radar bounced against the hull of the *Space Queen*. No human pilot could hold a ship that steady.

She appeared intent on locking to the *Space Queen's* after hatch. Mike wished her all the luck in the universe and hoped he had what she was looking for. In case of illness his stock of medicines was only standard and would not cover any extraordinary cases.

Then he stiffened. There was movement next to the antenna prow on the ship's nose. A small hatch was opening. Mike cursed himself for stupidity. Yet at the same time, he could think of nothing that should have made him suspicious. These were peaceful areas. It would have been ridiculous for bandits to work this area.

Raiding here made as much sense as operating in the heart of the Gobi Desert back on Terra.

Even as he whirled to try and reach the control cabin in time, a steel arm shot out from the pit uncovered by the raised hatch. Mike didn't see the fine-wired grid at the end of the arm but he knew it was there and he knew its purpose.

As he ran, he sensed the magnetic wires groping toward the hull of the *Space Queen*. If they made contact—

Contact was made while he ran up the companionway. The electroparalysis bolt hit him while he was still twenty feet from the control cabin. It caught him on his right toe with his left foot extended. It froze him in that position, held him in the grotesque running pose while fire poured through his veins. It held not only Mike and every other living thing aboard, but froze the ship itself into immobility; everything stopped except the raging movement of flaming gases in the jet tubes and these too died out as their source of supply was speedily choked.

Mike blacked out.

When his consciousness returned, Mike figured he had been out for about an hour. He based this on past experience with electroparalysis rays.

Using every ounce of will-power, he forced his elevated foot toward the companionway floor. The magnetic field permeating the dead ship was still potent, forming, in a sense, a maze of invisible wires, holding him in his frozen position.

He knew that in the companionway he had taken the full brunt of the charge. Possibly the others were again able to move about. But no one came to his aid.

His foot touched the floor. He pulled at his back foot like a man striving to loose himself from thick mud. He got it forward. A step, then another. From the control cabin came the sound of dolorous curses emitted in many languages. Nicko was again functioning.

Mike got his hands on the safety bars of the ladder leading down to the lounge. He pulled himself toward it and as he was descending, the magnetism of the electroparalytic bolt loosed its hold and he fell headlong. Picking himself up, he hurried into the lounge.

Doree was alone. She was still frozen to the chair in which she sat. Her legs were drawn up gracefully under her slim body. Only her eyes were alive—questioning, beseeching.

Mike picked her up, and laid her on the floor. He knelt and began massaging the rigid muscles, drawing her legs out slowly, watching her eyes for indications of pain.

"You'll be all right in a few minutes," he said. "We have to take it slow and easy or you'll get the bends."

While he worked he was asking himself questions. Who? In God's name—why? What reason had anyone for attacking the ship? There was nothing of value aboard. He had no enemies—to his knowledge—in this part of the universe.

Doree was trying to speak. Her throat worked. Her eyes were frantic. Mike got her legs straightened out without sending her into screaming pain. Now she was rising into a sitting position on her own power.

"Took — took — Fa — him —" she whispered hoarsely.

"Your father—where is he?"

"McKee — Talbott — took him!"

"Who in the hell are McKee and Talbott?"

Gradually, her throat unlocked. "They came in and took him—carried him out."

"I asked you who they were."

Tears welled in her eyes. She bit her lower lip and tried to control her fluttering throat. "I—I tried to scream. When they carried him out I couldn't do a thing." She burst into tears.

She was normal again. Mike got to his feet. "I've got to check the ship. When I get back I want some answers and you'd better have them ready."

He hurried from the lounge and up the ladder, almost slamming into Nicko as he gained the companionway. Nicko's scales were a sickly, pale green. He tottered weakly on his stumpy legs using all four of his arms to support himself against the bulkhead.

He grinned hideously. "Friends of yours?"

"I don't know who the hell they were. You all right?"

"I'm fine."

Mike scowled up and down the companionway. "What shape are we in?"

"Bad."

"How bad?"

"The worst. The pile's gone."

"The pile!"

Mike ran aft. The door to the tube cabin stood open. The alley into which the fifteen-pound, lead-crated pile had lately been driven, was empty.

Swiftly Mike assessed the situation. A helpless ship. A derelict. They'd entered through the aft airlock. They'd taken Professor Brandon off that way. Then they'd closed the lock again.

That meant only one thing. Through pure cruelty, they had avoided swift death to the ship's occupant in favor of a long, lingering one. Only the basest of men would do a thing like that.

Mike was not acquainted with McKee or Talbott, but he knew something about them. They were the lowest type of the human species. Only the bloodthirsty pirates of Ganymede ever made their victims walk space.

He returned to where Nicko was clinging to the companionway guard-rail. Nicko said, "You haven't seen it all, yet."

"Is there more?"

"That's only the beginning. They smashed every-

thing in the control cabin. All the navigating instruments. Even if we had a pile this boat couldn't find its way down Main Street at high noon."

It followed, Mike thought grimly. "I'll be drummed out of the Guild for this."

"If you ever get within shouting distance of Outer Port again, which you won't."

Mike doubled his fists. "To stand flatfooted and let a boarder move in and take my pile—and my client. How much of an idiot can a man be!"

Doree came up the ladder, her eyes wide with fright. "Did you find him?"

"No—and don't start crying. Why didn't you tell me about these men? Why didn't you give me a chance to protect my ship?"

"We—we didn't know they'd follow us. We—I didn't dream they had any idea of—"

"They followed you. And they had the idea. They took our pile and shoved us off on a blind orbit. They arranged for us to die out here."

"Won't we—we be found?"

"A million to one shot in these spaces."

"More than that," Nicko

said. "A billion to one. It's empty out here, lady."

Mike saw that Doree was again about to burst into tears. He took her by the arm. "We're going to the lounge and you're going to tell me all about this—what's been going on." He drew her toward the ladder, calling over his shoulder. "Clean up what you can, Nicko. See what other deviltry they arranged."

In the lounge, Mike sat Doree firmly into a chair. "Now let's not have any tears. Just tell it the way it happened."

Doree had got control of herself. She sat straight, miserable, a little pathetic, Mike thought. She said, "Lorn McKee and Dean Talbott were Paris art collectors. Their reputations were not of the best but when they approached father he listened to them."

"They had a strange looking scroll made of papyrus. It had writing on it in an ancient script and they wanted father to translate it for them."

"Would that have made it more valuable?"

"Of course. At first father was suspicious, thinking it was some kind of a hoax.

They told him the scroll had come from an Egyptian tomb but would tell him no more relative to its origination. They brought it to him because he was Terra's foremost authority in that field.

"Father discovered immediately that the scroll was genuine and very old. Papyrus was a material the ancient Egyptians used."

"And—?" Mike asked impatiently.

"He refused to translate it for them because they in turn would not tell him what they proposed to do with it. He felt it should be turned over to the proper authorities—some university — and besides, he was suspicious of the two men. So they went away and tried to get it translated elsewhere. This was impossible, so they came back and offered to sell it to father for a very low price but with the stipulation that he keep what he learned strictly to himself."

"He wanted to make the translation and was tempted because he already had a clue to its nature. He believed the scroll verified a theory long in existence on Terra relative to the extraterrestrial origination of mankind."

"You mean he thought it proved the Neanderthal and

Cro-Magnon came from other planets."

"No, not so far back as that. There is little doubt they originated on Terra. Father is a specialist in Egyptology. And it was his belief that a great deal of their early history was purposely distorted. There is confusion in what little can be found concerning them and father sincerely believed they came from another planet. He was sure they brought with them a knowledge of science far greater than any existing upon Terra."

"And the papyrus verified his belief?"

"Completely."

"What did it tell him?"

"That the forefathers of those who later became the Egyptians, left their native planet after a disagreement with the ruling Pharaoh and sought a new home. They cruised for several lifetimes, raising and educating their children and dying off, until they found Terra, a planet almost identical to their own. The papyrus gave the location of their home planet—hieroglyphics which father translated into a table of accurate equations."

"How could he know they were accurate?"

Doree's head came up sharply. "If you were really aware of my father's ability in his field, it wouldn't occur to you to ask."

"I don't blame you for your faith but I still think it was a gigantic hoax—for one reason."

"And that—?"

"If the ancestors of the Egyptians came to Terra, they had to have great scientific and technical knowledge to get there. All right—then what happened to the knowledge and the science? The Egyptians certainly didn't take advantage of it."

"They used some of it. No one has been able to prove conclusively how they built the pyramids."

"Slave labor."

"That is not a complete explanation."

"All right — forget the pyramids. What happened to the rest of their science?"

"The answer lies in a basic trend of the Egyptians as a people. They were completely preoccupied with death rather than life. To them, their years of living was only a period in which to prepare for eternity. Their ambitions and talents were directed toward the building of great tombs and the perfect pres-

ervation of bodies after death. In the light of this does it seem so strange that they turned their backs on all knowledge except that which aided them in dead directions?"

Mike was regarding Doree with a new respect. "I owe you an apology. You're a smart girl. You've got a brain in your head. I'm so used to carting empty-headed females around the System that I'd forgotten smart ones existed."

"I'm sure you mean that as a compliment, but the fact remains that father and I blundered you into a perilous position. We should have told you about McKee and Talbott. But we didn't think—"

"Your shortcoming was that you were honest and thought everyone else was. That's a common failing."

"But we knew they had bad reputations."

"It's pretty obvious how their thinking went. They must have had a clue to the contents of the papyrus. They knew your father wouldn't act without integrity but they banked on his eagerness as a student—figured it would cause him to accept their terms in order to get his hands on the scroll be-

cause there was certainly nothing dishonorable about buying it from them. They knew also that he would keep his word, being that kind of a man."

Doree's shoulders drooped in misery. "I guess that's about it."

"It was the best way they could think of to get the papyrus translated and still keep the contents secret." Mike rubbed his chin. "They were pretty smart boys. They were certain your father would find a way to act on whatever information it contained and all they had to do was stay on his trail and await their opportunity."

"How could anyone be so vile?"

Mike ignored the question. "I said they were smart, but they weren't smart enough."

"What do you mean?"

"This little trick of marooning us on a fatal orbit in space. It won't work."

"Why not?"

"We'll follow them."

Doree was completely bewildered. "But you said your pile was stolen."

"It was. We won't need it."

"And all your instruments were smashed."

"We won't need them, either. Your father will tell them the planet's location."

There's not much else he can do. Then—we'll follow them."

"One of us is crazy," Doree said, weakly.

"No. McKee and Talbott were just badly informed. They have an automatic ship and evidently don't know too much about it. You see, the electroparalysis ray has one basic element around which it functions—magnetism. The jolt they handed us was of such size that it created a magnetic field around their ship. If they had been going through an asteroid belt they would have been bombarded into oblivion. As it is they'll still be bombarded in a sense—by us."

"You mean—"

"The field envelopes their ship and trails out behind it like an invisible chain. They couldn't possibly have shoved us hard enough to get us clear of it. So when they pulled out, the *Space Queen* nosed right around and followed them." Mike grinned. "We're on their tail right now, just as surely as if they had us on a tow-rope."

"Then we can still help father!"

Mike sobered. "We don't know what we can do. We're still not out of the woods. There's a little problem of landing a dead ship on that

planet after we come within range of its gravity. Then, too, heaven only knows where we'll set down. If it's a big planet—"

Instead of wincing before this new peril, Doree stiffened against it. "I'm sure you'll do all that any man could do."

"I'll do my best."

"And so long as the whole disaster was our fault—"

"Forget it." Mike conscious of a warmth rising within him, took his eyes quickly from her face and went to check ship . . .

The slow passage of time was the most difficult factor to contend with. Mike wracked his brain for a means of speeding up the *Space Queen*. He was confident that the craft was moving straight and true in the wake of the other ship and that unless drastic adjustments were made in the course, she would continue to do so. But so slowly—so very slowly. Acceleration caused by the magnetic field had long-since reached its apex and now the *Space Queen* moved at a steady unchanging pace.

He achieved a little more speed by taking charges from three of the primers, placing them in the pile head, and



igniting with the fourth primer. He picked up possibly two Gs before the power burned out.

He and Nicko donned space suits, magnetized themselves aft, and opened the suit's drive plugs to the maximum. The resulting force smashed them against the hull, almost breaking their ribs. Some additional acceleration was achieved but pathetically little.

Who would have thought, Mike pondered bitterly, that I'd land out here pushing my own ship through space? What a laugh the wits at Outer Port would get when and if this little adventure was sounded around. *If*—that was the big word that stuck in Mike's mind.

An important facet of the problem was keeping Doree's morale high. Mike enjoyed this. He learned all about her and there came a sudden dizzy moment when he found himself kissing her. After that he was more careful.

Then, at the last came the great thrill—abruptly, as all such things come. Mike was puttering with the radio when Nicko turned from the port to say, "Indescribably beautiful land ho! Luscious round planet dead ahead at five o'clock!"

Mike leaped to the port. Smaller than Terra and with different continental markings, but in other respects, quite similar. Nicko jumped up and down clapping his four hands. Mike grabbed him and lifted him in a bear-hug, scratching himself unmercifully on the little Martian's sharp scales. Then he bolted aft to tell Doree.

There was no restraint in his kiss this time and for a few moments the ship and the landfall vanished from their minds. They did not know where they were; nor did they care.

Then Mike jerked himself back to the business at hand and rushed to the pilot cabin; the dangerous business ahead of them.

They were already in range, being gripped and dragged down by the planet's pull. Mike ordered Nicko and Doree into straps and buckled himself into the pilot's chair.

He surveyed the fast-greatening planet. There would be no choice of landing fields. Mike could only hope to bring the *Spaca Queen* down on dry land rather than in the center of an ocean.

She was responding to her fins now and Mike put her

into a long glide. Below, the land and the water separated themselves and Mike studied the gray expanse below. Ocean.

Mike leveled out and struggled for altitude. There was minor response as the atmosphere outside clawed at the hull, dragging it down, heating it a dull red.

All during the trip he had fought inertia. Now his problem was reversed, rapid acceleration being the demon of the moment. A helpless shell rocketing toward a solid obstacle.

Mike felt a surge of relief as the streaming gray below turned to racing green. At least they would not finish up trapped in a submarine. But the land could be as lethal as the sea and now the moment was at hand.

Mike angled the fins to their maximum. He yelled. "Contact!" Then he prayed.

There was a great crash—and oblivion.

Pain brought back Mike's consciousness. Without opening his eyes, he analyzed the pain. It was in his shoulder. He tried the muscles gingerly and decided it wasn't broken. If that was the case the others could have come through also. The results of crashes

of this kind were usually extreme one way or another. Either the passengers came through unhurt or they were mangled into stew meat. Mike opened his eyes.

All was quiet. Both Nicko and Doree lay motionless under their straps; still unconscious but with no visible injuries. But there was something else there in the center of the cabin floor; something Mike's dazed mind had difficulty in accepting.

A snake.

It was coiled lazily, its green and gold body the thickness of a man's arm. It had a flat, triangular head with deadliness written all over it and its eyes were upon the only moving thing in the room—Doree's rising and falling breast.

The chill that went through Mike almost paralyzed him. In hypnotized fascination he watched the sinuous uncoiling of the serpent; the gliding movement in Doree's direction.

Then the girl's eyes opened.

"Don't move!" Mike snapped. "Everything is all right. We got down. But you must stop breathing—hold your breath. Don't even move your eyes! Stare straight at the ceiling."

Doree obeyed, and thus did not see the snake. But her fright was apparent. Mike moved a slow hand toward the buckle on his chest. The serpent's head flicked around at the movement. Mike's cold hand gripped the buckle. He knew the snake's length was such that it could reach him in a single long strike. He could only hope the serpent would hesitate for a few seconds. The snake's head came around, then drew back.

At that moment a voice broke the silence. "You—beautiful serpent. Gorgeous green and gold clothes line. Over this way. Here I am." Nicko's voice and with it the little Martian unbuckled his strap and put his feet on the floor.

A hiss. The snake struck. Doree turned her eyes downward and screamed. The snake's great head slammed against Nicko's leg. The Martian laughed.

The snake ricocheted backward, dazed from the contact, two of its fangs broken off on Nicko's steel-hard scales. Nicko got up and walked over and put his heel on the serpent's head and crushed it. As the long body lashed and writhed, Nicko looked down at it with a kind

of compassion. "Good-bye, little sister." Nicko looked over at Mike in assumed surprise. "Was my pretty cousin bothering you? She only wanted to say hello."

"All right," Mike barked. "You've had your little joke. Let's find out where we are."

"In a jungle I guess—from the nature of the welcoming committee."

Mike helped Doree from her couch. She had sustained no injuries other than a slightly sprained wrist. Mike got a rifle from the gun cabinet, gave another to Nicko and armed Doree with a small pistol which she tried to refuse.

Investigation showed the hull to be intact but two of the hatches had been torn off their hinges and were nowhere in sight.

"A beautiful glide," Nicko commented, looking back at the broad furrow that gave evidence of how the *Space Queen* had come in. It was a good thing for them.

"A lucky one," Mike replied. He scanned the thick tropical vegetation on every side.

"We could be down in the green jungles of Terra," Nicko said.

"We could at that. There

is a river around here somewhere."

"How do you know?"

"I got a flash of a river as we glided in. Thought we were going to hit it. Then we went over. It ought to be in that direction. Let's go."

Doree, still stunned by the episode of the snake, was mute and pale as she followed close behind Mike. Nicko brought up the rear. The going was hard until Mike broke through into a comparatively open area. He pointed. "There it is."

A silent, ominous river, dark under the hot rays of a high sun. Around them, nothing moved; only the black waters of the river rushing onward toward some distant rendezvous with the sea. Doree shuddered.

Mike drew her into the circle of his arm. "Don't be afraid. This is a break—just what we wanted. All rivers go somewhere and this one saves us from fighting our way through the jungle an inch at a time."

"But we have no boat."

"We can make a boat." Nicko said. "The rubber mattresses and cushions from the ship. I'll bet no one on this planet has ever seen such a boat as we'll have."

Mike and Nicko struggled back and forth from the river bank to the ship, bringing what was needed. Doree, fearing to remain alone, trailed with them until she was exhausted, whereupon Mike began building the raft, leaving the rest of the trips to the indestructible Nicko. Mike bound the mattresses and cushions to a base of woven reeds. The reeds grew in abundance in a nearby swamp. Doree helped with the braiding and the work went swiftly.

Nicko made a half dozen more trips and returned from the last one with several scales knocked off his back. "Somebody threw a brick at me," he said.

Mike scanned the now-menacing jungle wall. "A brick?"

"That was what it felt like. It hurt like hell."

"You didn't see anybody?"

"I did not. I didn't wait long enough."

"We've got to get out of here."

"An observation of amazing erudition."

Mike lashed a long flat piece of driftwood to the raft as a steering oar, found two other such pieces to serve as unattached oars, and helped Nicko finish with loading the

supplies. "All right," he said. "Let's go."

They cast loose and while Doree worked with the stern oar, Mike and Nicko paddled feverishly toward the middle of the river. With this objective achieved, Nicko took over the stern. Mike forced Doree to lie down. He put a pillow under her head, kissed her and sat beside her until her eyes closed. Then he went back and sat down beside Nicko.

The latter had not forgotten his terrifying grin. "We certainly get around, don't we?" he said cheerfully.

"I'm glad it makes you so happy."

"As a matter of fact I'm scared stiff. It is just that my sainted mother told me always to keep a brave front."

Mike looked at his assistant with sudden fondness. "Who was your mother, Nicko?"

Nicko shook his dragon's head sadly. "I can't seem to remember but I know I had one. And of course she was saintly."

"And your father?"

A distant sound intruded, touching Mike's ears lightly. His eyes were still upon Nicko as the latter said, "You've got me—but I have

a feeling he was a gallant knight in armor who swept my beautiful mother off her fairy-like feet."

"No doubt," Mike smiled. The sound was louder now, but it still did not catch his attention. He was remembering that encounter in the polar forests of Mars; the day he found little Nicko crouching under a bush; how he'd come within an ace of putting a bullet into the hideous creature's brain. But some vagrant touch of compassion had stayed him. The little monster seemed so lost, so pathetic, so helpless. He'd taken Nicko back to camp, the Martian infant's parentage and ancestry a mystery Mike felt would never be solved.

What sort of hideous mating had occurred, he wondered, to produce this mongrel creature with the brain of a human and the body of a beast? Mike held forth his hand. "You were a vicious little devil," he said. "I'll wear that scar forever."

Nicko sighed gustily. "If you beat me unmercifully each fine morning for the rest of my miserable life, the punishment would be light for such a heinous deed."

Mike laughed and started to get to his feet. Halfway

up, he paused, crouching there. Then his voice thundered. "Grab an oar! Pull for shore! Pull for God's sake!"

In an instant both of them were tearing the water in an effort to reach the nearest bank. As they worked, the current upon which they moved swept forward at an ever-increasing speed and the roar about them was like the crashing of skyscrapers under bombardment.

They came ashore a scant six feet above certain death. Fortunately the raft was light and they were able to gain a foothold and lift it from the snarling waters.

Then, gasping for breath, they moved a few feet downstream and stood looking at the frothing cataract that dropped the great river a sheer two-hundred feet to boulders below.

"I ought to be whipped for not attending to business," Mike said bitterly.

Doree was clinging to his arm looking down at the awe-inspiring sight. "You saved us, darling. Why should you criticize yourself?"

"It was too close—far too close."

Nicko said, "It seems to me the important thing now is where we go from here."

"We carry the raft down those rocks and beyond the rough water."

"But why all that effort? Couldn't we be as happy up here as down there?"

"All rivers lead to civilization," Mike said. "Or at least, they lead to the places civilization naturally springs up."

"A logical observation."

"Also, I've got a hunch about this river. I may be wrong but I think it might take us right where we want to go. I'll bet there are interesting things ahead."

Mike turned and directed his words to Doree. "That papyrus your father translated said the forefathers of the Egyptians sought a planet similar to their own. Perhaps the similarity had to be more than general. Such a thing is indicated by their traveling around for several lifetimes. Anyhow, except for the tropical climate, this river bears a great resemblance to one of the tributaries that feeds the Nile back on Terra."

"You're quite right," Doree marveled.

"And this could well be Victoria Falls. I wonder if another Egypt doesn't lie below."

There was awe in Doree's voice. "Before Egypt—"

"What did you say?"

"An Egypt—a great civilization that flourished on this planet before Egypt—before the Terran Egypt was even dreamed of."

Mike smiled fleetingly. "That's what you and your father have believed, isn't it? So why be surprised?"

"It's just that—well, being so close to it—realizing it might *really* exist—"

Mike laughed. "I understand. But we're still a long way from it." He turned to the Martian. "Come on, Nicko, Let's get busy with this stuff."

The portage was laborious and dangerous. It took the balance of that day. Even when the sun set they had still not reached the termination of white water.

They found an open area beside the racing river that would have been covered during high water and Mike decided it would be a good place to camp. While Mike broke out the supplies, and Doree prepared the meal, Nicko stood on the alert with a rifle over his arm scanning the line of undergrowth at the edge of the forest.

After all three had eaten, Mike directed Nicko to bed

down in order to be ready for the second watch. He urged Doree to sleep also, but she insisted on sitting with him during his watch. And though her head drooped several times, she remained with him and refused to sleep.

When Nicko took over the watch, Mike stretched out under his blanket near Doree. He dozed off and was then awakened by a pressure against his back. Doree, snuggling close. "It's cold," she murmured, and drifted to sleep with a contented sigh. It was a calm, restful slumber.

The sharp bark of Nicko's rifle awakened Mike after what seemed to him only a few moments of sleep. He sprang up to find dawn breaking and Nicko sending another shot into the undergrowth.

Mike grabbed his own rifle and ran to the Martian's side. "What's wrong?"

Nicko lowered his weapon. "I saw four platoons of infantry charging out of the brush—I think."

"In other words you think maybe you saw something. You don't know what it was. It could have been nothing at all."

"All right. Have it your way," Nicko said serenely.

"Come on. Let's get going. We'll eat something on the raft."

But they never reached the raft. Mike's words had hardly been spoken when the forest erupted with a mass of savagery. Several hundred tall, screaming black men clad sketchily in brilliantly colored feathers and paint.

Both rifles barked. Nicko's shot was high, but Mike brought the foremost of the black warriors skidding forward on his face.

Maybe that will stop them, Mike thought desperately. Maybe they've never seen firearms before. He held up his second shot for the briefest moment hoping the savages would be awed into retreat.

But this was not the case. They charged forward in renewed fury and Mike again went to work. He dropped three more of the charging maniacs while Nicko, probably the poorest shot who ever lifted a rifle, accounted for one unfortunate warrior with a twenty-shot spray of atomic pellets.

The black men, who had had only a scant fifty yards

to cover, were now upon the three. Two of them seized Doree, an act which turned Mike into a terrible fighting machine.

Not able to fire the gun effectively at such close range, he reversed it and created bloody havoc, using the butt as a club. Two skulls cracked sharply under its impact and as he fought, Mike saw Nicko go down. He couldn't reach him.

Several warriors raised the iron-toothed clubs they carried and crashed them down upon Nicko's unprotected body.

The result would have been comic under less grim circumstances. The clubs of the warriors caused Nicko's almost indestructible hide to ring like a great bell. The handle of one warrior's lethal bludgeon snapped and the attacker stared at it in amazement. The rest beat down again upon the prone Nicko, their clubs bouncing off and resounding in a sort of anvil chorus.

The attention of the warriors bent upon annihilating Mike was diverted by the intriguing spectacle of this strange four-armed creature refusing to be clubbed to death. So Mike was able to get in some telling blows that



felled three more of the terrible warriors.

He knew however, that the end was already written in the bloody sands around him. He could only fight to the last moment, bringing down as many of the enemy as possible.

His heart was sick at what would surely be Doree's fate. He saw her just beyond the perimeter of battle still held by her two captors who were viewing the fight with rapt interest. If he could only reach her. One swing of his gun butt and she would serve no vile purpose in the hands of these raiders.

Mike mowed a bloody path in her direction. He covered more than half the distance before he knew he would never make it.

However, the end of this affair was not written in the sands, but in the skies overhead. Mike realized this when the attackers stopped fighting, all eyes turned heavenward in sudden terror. Mike's eyes followed theirs and he saw the ship.

It was a craft such as he could never have imagined in dream or reverie. A great rectangular platform, its polished sides inlaid with



The beastman's intent was all too clear.

gold and fist-sized gems. There was a high railing around its edge over which myriad faces peered down. Above it, elevated upon shining cables, were two glowing balls not more than two feet in diameter, and even in his preoccupation with more serious matters, Mike realized the whole craft was suspended from these two balls, that they were its means of bouyancy.

Then he was in the midst of a disordered flight as the warriors charged screaming back to the forest. The ship was settling swiftly toward the surface of the river and now a crystalline ray of some sort shot out from the forward deck, cutting down the terrorized warriors in their flight.

Every able-bodied one had fled the scene of battle. Some gained the forest where the crystalline ray crisped the overgrowth into black ashes as it nipped at their singed heels. Those not fortunate enough to escape were but small nubs of blackened ashes on the open shore.

The ray had avoided touching the heart of the battleground and Mike found himself standing alone among the bodies of the blacks he

had dispatched. Nicko was getting wearily to his feet. Doree stood frozen nearby, abandoned by her captors, the great ship holding her gaze as a snake would hold that of a bird.

The ship hung motionless a few inches above the rushing water, its port side flanking the shore. And as a section of the railing arced down from its position to become a landing ladder, Mike realized the futility of delayed flight.

This was a fighting ship; a patrol craft ready and able to spread devastation in any direction. There were perhaps a hundred men aboard and as a squad filed down the ladder, Mike was struck by the perfection of their six-foot bodies and by the pride and arrogance of their manner.

Their attitude was one of casual contempt mixed with mild interest. Doree had moved into the shelter of his arm and the grumbling Nicko had also come close but with interest centered more upon his aching scales than this new possible enemy.

While the squad stood at attention, their leader surveyed the bloody section of shore. He checked each of the prone men and found only

one still alive, a seven-foot, ebon-skinned warrior who got to his feet when the leader kicked him and stood erect but swaying drunkenly from the blow Mike had laid across his skull during the battle.

Shoving the warrior roughly toward the silent trio, the leader took a small object from the gold-inlaid shoulder sack that seemed to be a part of his uniform. The object consisted of a short rod with a crystal ball on one end. The man grasped the ball in his palm, pointed the rod at the fallen men and began spraying them with the same crystalline ray that had emanated from the ship. The resulting fire was instantaneous and intense. The prone bodies crackled for a moment and were reduced to charred fragments. The leader went about this work with the distasteful look of a man cleaning out a garbage pail. When the task was finished, he turned his attention to the four prisoners.

Nicko was the prime object of his interest. He cut the little Martian out of the group, shoving him roughly aside, then walked slowly around him several times as though unable to convince

himself that such an improbable creature could really exist.

A sharp command from the deck of the ship terminated his inspection and he spoke brusquely to the group in a tongue Mike did not understand.

"What did he say?" Mike asked of Nicko.

For once, the latter was not interested. "How do I know?" he growled. "Gad! My aching back!"

The leader motioned to the squad, whereupon the prisoners were pushed toward the ladder.

The boarding was accomplished swiftly. The prisoners were herded forward and onto a gold-inlaid bench just above the prow. The ladder was lifted and the craft moved straight upward like an elevator.

After ascending three or four hundred yards, it leveled off and swept gently forward, down-river. None of those aboard laid hands upon the prisoners. Nicko was still the center of attention and also of the conversation passed among the soldiers. They were handsome specimens, erect and beautifully built, clad in identical uniforms the cost of which would have been staggering

on Terra or anywhere else in the System.

"This ship," Mike said. "Is there anything familiar about it?"

He had spoken to Doree and the latter looked at him questioningly and then glanced about the ship. "I've certainly never seen anything like it before."

"Of course not, but the styling, the decorations, they could only be classed as—"

"Egyptian!"

"At least a forerunner of what we consider Egyptian. And this river. Look out ahead of us. See how it broadens. See the wide level fields on either side."

"The Nile," Doree whispered.

"Not the Nile, but obviously a sister. The Egyptians who fled this planet certainly hunted until they found exactly what they wanted—found it on Terra in a system far from their own."

Mike turned his attention to a conversation that was going on between Nicko and the black prisoner. The language was a primitive guttural of some sort but Nicko was obviously using it skillfully. He grinned at Mike and said, "We were wrong about those people. They are fine characters. This is M'landa,

a leader of the tribe known as the H'Lorkas—or at least that's as close as I can give it to you in Terran. He is an extremely fine fellow."

"Is that so?" Mike asked grimly. "Then why did they grab Doree?"

"They meant her no harm. They didn't want her injured."

"I can imagine why. And if they're such fine fellows why did they attack us?"

The question seemed to embarrass Nicko. "I guess my aim wasn't so bad after all. They were keeping a sharp eye on us—wishing us no harm whatever. But when I fired, I killed one so they naturally got sore."

"What does he know about this outfit?"

"Scoundrels. We would have been better off with the H'Lorkas. This is a patrol ship of the Ptomenites. They are the tyrants of this planet, their power contested only by the people of Baserite to the north. But the Baserites always come out on the bloody end of the stick."

"Has he any idea what will happen to us?"

"He expects to be sacrificed to some slob of a god they worship. Then his body will be preserved and put in

a trophy room they call the Gallery of the Dead."

Mike turned a quick, meaningful look at Doree, but he had no time to comment because at that moment the door of a small cabin opened and a girl came forth. The cabin was aft of the ship and the girl came swiftly forward, pride and arrogance written in every line of her beautiful body.

But it was not these qualities that caused Mike to gasp and Doree to blush deeply. It was the regal figure's almost complete nudity. She wore only the briefest of attire across her breast and hips.

"My dark friend says that's Katal'halee, Princess of the Ptomenites," Nicko whispered. "She rides along with the boys once in a while for the exhilarating pleasure of it."

"I imagine the boys get a little pleasure out of having her along, too," Mike said.

Then, with the queenly nude not a dozen feet away, Doree grasped Mike's arm. He glanced across and saw that her eyes were sweeping past Katal'halee to the small cabin. Its door had again opened. Two men emerged and moved forward. They seemed entirely at home and wore smug smiles.

"Lorn McKee!" Doree gasped. "Dean Talbott!"

The Terran origination of these two was obvious. McKee was bald, paunchy, middle-aged, his face loose from easy living. Talbott tended toward the more athletic figure. He was dark, his eyes clear and sharp, his mouth cruel.

"Surprise," Nicko said with a noticeable lack of warmth in his voice. "Bet you never expected to see us on your front porch."

Talbott smiled coldly. "Yes, and no. After we left you in space we thought we were rid of you. But we saw you tagging after us when we were over the planet and it was too late to do anything about it. Congratulations. How did you manage it?"

"What have you done with my father?" Doree asked.

Talbott pondered the loathing in her eyes. It did not seem to bother him. "Your father is well taken care of. He will be—" McKee raised a delicate hand. "But the details would only horrify you."

Mike was on his feet and had the Terran by the throat. Talbott gagged and flailed helplessly. He was no weakling, but still not a

match for Mike's strength and rage.

The haughty-eyed native girl had been standing silent, regarding the tableaux. Now she snapped a command and two soldiers stepped forward and seized Mike. A third hit Mike a vicious blow across the skull with the flat of an ugly jeweled sword he carried. Mike staggered and fell back on the bench, blood running from his scalp.

Talbott rubbed his throat and adjusted his clothing. Viciousness shone in his eyes. "We had no great animosity toward you before, but now—"

"That's why you left us stranded in space?" Mike asked.

"It was just that we did not want to bloody our hands killing you but you had to be got out of the way."

"Well, we're in the way now."

"Not at all. We have had time to put ourselves in solid with these fierce but rather stupid people. We've also had time to arrange for this hostile reception accorded you. We told them—"

"I can't see that it matters what you told them. We can see the result."

"I'm more interested in

how you got to them," Nicko said. "You don't know their lingo."

"There are ways if one has the time." McKee had come forward and was regarding Nicko with interest. He was not alone. Katal'halee and every soldier within range was also regarding him with interest. "Just what manner of creature is this, anyhow?" Talbott asked.

"Why you slab-sided slob —!" Nicko yelled.

Talbott flushed and took a backward step. The three soldiers moved forward, scowling.

"Take it easy," Mike said. "We know how we stand. It's just as well we don't antagonize these people any further until we can get some kind of foothold."

"You'll get a foothold," McKee sneered. "In the priests' embalming rooms." With that, he turned and walked away, obviously satisfied with the situation. Talbott turned to follow him. He bowed to Katal'halee as though awaiting her pleasure. The proud native Princess appeared to have had enough of this spectacle and moved haughtily aft. As he followed her, Talbott glanced swiftly back at the prisoners as if to say: See

*how solidly we're in? You haven't got a chance.* This was all too evident.

"What do you suppose they're up to?" Mike asked.

Doree looked up questioningly. "What do you mean?"

"They aren't just here to enjoy the hospitality of these people. They've got something more in mind."

"They're after the loot, what else?" Nicko said.

"If you're right and I think you are, they must have a plan. And if the plan is what I think it is, they've got their ship ready for a quick blast-off."

Doree's face was tight with inner turmoil. "We've got to find father! We've got to help him!"

Mike took her hand. "We'll do our best, but you must keep a grip on yourself. Your going to pieces won't help."

Doree made an effort. "I'm sorry. I'll—"

Her words were broken off by sudden activity on the ship. Mike glanced out and noted the landscape had changed to one of broad cultivation. The rough jungle country had completely vanished. Obviously the ship had been moving at great speed, its effect on the passengers lessened by the huge

glass shield in front of the ship's prow. Looking ahead, he could see the spires of a city in the distance.

But this was not the object of the patrol's concern. Their eyes were riveted to another ship—a strange shining craft that was moving in from the left at great speed.

Mike heard shouts of both consternation and anger in the odd tongue of these people as they appeared to be girding for battle.

The approaching ship was of radically different design than the one on which they were trapped. It was completely of metal and had no golden or jeweled decorations. It was long and slim and completely enclosed and had the appearance of a true fighting ship. None of its passengers were visible.

Nicko had been talking to the feathered warrior. The latter had sat silent during the brush with McKee and Talbott and Mike had almost forgotten his presence.

Nicko turned in excitement. "He says that's a Baserite raider! He says it's very seldom they come in so close but that one's planning to raise general hell with this scow. This isn't one of the Ptomenite's fighter fleet and

we'll have a pretty rough time."

The golden craft was following a two-pronged plan. The Ptomenites were spraying the sky with their deadly crystal ray and at the same time kiting for home as fast as the ship would go. Out beyond, the slim ship did a remarkable roll to avoid the ray and screamed in for the kill.

The wind was howling around the Ptomenite ship now, and her timbers groaned under the pressure. Then the Baserite craft attempted a strike. It appeared to be trying for only a close arc but at the last moment it nosed down in a breathtaking maneuver and streaked straight for the exposed deck.

Frantically, the Ptomenites brought their ray gun around to bear on the death-laden juggernaut. They were partially successful, spitting forth a deadly barrage just as the prow of the attacker crashed into the deck.

Had the blow been untested, the Baserite ship would have roared on through and gone its way in triumph. But the crystalline force-field crashed out with a viciousness of its own. It

had no seeming effect upon the hull of the Baserite raider, but it hurled the craft back from its position and far out into the sky.

Great damage had already been done, however. A gaping hole left the bejeweled deck almost split in two. But by lucky chance, the overhead globes had not been damaged and the speed of the Ptomenite ship did not diminish.

It was streaking toward the city, now seen clearly from the deck and as the Baserite ship righted itself, Mike saw similar ships—sleek metal fighters, rising from a port near the city.

The commander of the Baserite ship seemed to be making a decision as his craft hung in space. To attack or flee? Could he reach and demolish the crippled barge before the Ptomenite fighters reached the scene?

Both Mike and Nicko hung upon this indecision. Nicko said, "I hope that stupid codger doesn't commit suicide. If he does, we go down too."

"Maybe it's just as well," Mike said grimly.

"I've always subscribed to staying alive as long as possible," Nicko retorted.

The commander made his



decision. The ship streaked in, dancing like a zephyr to avoid the crystalline ray. But there was no longer any great danger from this because the tilt of the deck made accurate aiming impossible for the Ptomenites.

Straight in for the kill now, came the Baserite ship; straight in toward the crippled deck awash with the blood of smashed and maimed soldiers; alive with the screams of the agonized and the dying.

Doree covered her face with her hands and came into Mike's arms. So she did not see that the Ptomenites had one maneuver left; a perilous one, but nonetheless a maneuver.

The craft was now over the level ground on the near outskirts of the city. It hung motionless, allowing the Baserite craft to take deadly aim.

But as the sleek ship rocketed in, the commander of the Ptomenite craft waited until the last moment and then released whatever force held the ship in the air. The split deck dropped like a stone, but too late for the other ship to change course.

The Baserites had gambled and lost. As the ship arced again skyward, a dozen

similar fighters closed in from two directions. They emitted the deadly crystalline fire. For a few moments, the Baserite ship seemed unharmed. Then it's hull began to glow; a faint pink, a cherry red, a bright crimson. Then a brilliant explosion lighted a sky made hazy by the descending sun. And there was nothing.

Even as the Ptomenite ship plummeted downward, Mike marveled at the effectiveness of the crystalline ray. Nothing remotely resembling it existed in the universe he knew. Then his attention was concentrated solely upon perils of the moment. The Ptomenite commander was not able to stop the rapid descent. He could only lessen it slightly and Mike held Doree tight in his arms when the crash came.

He noted, fleetingly, that neither McKee nor Talbott had been injured by the thrust of the Baserite ship. The door to the after cabin was open and he saw them crouching inside, terror written across their faces. Standing above them, proud and erect in the face of death, stood the Princess Katal'halee and Mike felt a touch of admiration. Then the craft hit the ground . . .

Mike realized he was not unconscious. He realized also that the ship had braked slightly against the rocketing drop at just the last moment.

It had blunted the force of the impact but little, however, and chaos reigned upon the shattered deck. Mike found that both Nicko and Doree were unconscious but that the H'Lorkan tribesman was shaking his head groggily.

Mike looked swiftly about. The dust cleared slightly nearby and he saw that the prow of the deck had buckled as it hit, leaving a dark opening beneath. There was room for a man in there. Mike glanced around. In the confusion, no one was paying any attention to the prisoners. Help was coming from the city but the rescuers were still quite a distance away.

Mike motioned to the H'Lorkan, gesturing frantically. The other quickly understood. Mike picked Doree up and put her inside the dark opening. He followed her and moved her further inside away from the small opening.

Then he looked out to find that the H'Lorkan had had difficulty with Nicko, but

had found a way of grasping him so as not to get cut by the sharp scales. He pushed the little Martian's body in to Mike and followed quickly.

Mike turned immediately to Doree and began examining her for injury. There was a small gash on her forehead and a bruise on her shoulder. She moaned and opened her eyes.

Mike put a finger over her lips. "Be very quiet."

"Where are we? What happened?"

"The ship crashed," he whispered, "but we may be safe for a while."

Doree smiled weakly. "I thought it was the end."

"How do you feel?"

"All right—I guess. Nothing seems to be broken."

"Lie and rest." Mike turned and found Nicko was sitting up, his eyes open but still a trifle vacant. "You okay?"

"Guess so. They couldn't kill me with a club but I get knocked out coming downstairs."

"Something must have hit you on the head just right."

"Something sure did. Tell me, what's the situation?"

"I don't know. I'm playing it from hand to mouth. We're hidden under the ruins of the ship."

"They'll be after us."

"If they weren't killed."

Mike found a small opening and peered out. Help had come from the city now and he saw a line of stretcher bearers moving away from the wreck. His spirits rose as he identified three of the casualties. McKee, Talbott, Katal'halee. Were any or all of them dead? He had no way of knowing. But at least they appeared to be past caring about the four prisoners—at least for a time.

This did not insure safety however. The entrance to the improvised cave darkened and a face appeared. Mike held his breath, expecting challenge and exposure.

But none came. Then Mike realized that dusk had fallen and the eyes of the searcher could not penetrate their hiding place with any degree of surety. There were sharp words in the alien tongue. Obviously the searcher was calling for any trapped or injured person.

Desperately, Mike hoped he would let it go at that. But such was not the case. The man got down on his knees and pushed inside.

He found himself taken instantly into the iron grasp of three desperate tenants. The H'Lorkan got him by the

legs, Nicko hit him in the middle, and Mike got strong hands on his throat, drove powerful fingers into it, shutting off the man's breath forever.

The man struggled helplessly for a few moments. Then he lay still as Mike snapped his neck suddenly backward and broke it.

The darkness served another purpose. It kept Doree from the horror of seeing a man killed not two feet from her eyes. But she realized what was happening and buried her face in her hands.

"I'm sorry," Mike whispered. "But this is a matter of survival. Try and look at it in that light."

There was nothing to do now but wait. Mike's hopes were slim and desperate ones—that the slain man would not be missed for a while, and that the wreckage of the ship would not be cleared away until the following day.

The time dragged. Activity around the wreck dwindled and died out. Total darkness had not yet come and Mike prayed for a few more minutes of safety. But he was not to get it. A commotion over toward the city brought him to a break in the wreckage through which he could scan

the area. A huge derrick-like affair, encrusted with the usual gold and gems, was lumbering toward the wrecked platform. A gang of workmen followed on foot. Incandescent balls were carried by another group, brightly illuminating the scene.

"We've got to run for it!" Mike said. "Out—everybody! Run straight to the left! There's an airfield over there. McKee and Talbott's ship is on the far edge. I saw it just before we fell!"

The four wormed their way out from under the wreckage. "That ship should be primed to go!" Nicko said with excitement.

"That's what I'm hoping."

"No!" Doree cried, and pulled away from Mike. "No! I won't go away from here and leave my father! We've got to try to help him!"

Mike did not hesitate. He swung a short solid right. It cracked against Doree's jaw and she went limp. "Sorry," he said grimly, "but this is no time to argue."

"We're going to hit that ship and blast out?" Nicko asked.

"What else? She'll hate me for it, but we've got to use common sense. There's nothing we can do for Professor

Brandon this trip. Maybe we can come back later."

"It will be hard on the kitty."

"Okay," Mike retorted harshly. "My responsibility is getting Doree out of here alive!"

"I'm not arguing," Nicko said. "Let's move."

The H'Lorkan had remained silent the whole time. He had done what was expected of him promptly and efficiently and proven himself a good comrade. But there was no time now to explain the plan to him. If he had remained where he was they would probably have gone off and left him. But when they started across the open country, he ran with them.

Mike momentarily expected the light from the glowing bulbs to pick them out, but luck was with them and they gained the edge of the airfield without being detected. They disappeared in among the craft. There was quite an assortment of these and from the design and variations in size, Mike got the impression they were pleasure craft and not a part of the fighting force. Encrusted jewels were used in profusion and decorations along with both silver and gold. On this planet these precious materials seemed to

have little value as no guards were posted over the field.

There were lights in a few of them. These, Mike carefully skirted until the party came at last to the sleek black hull of the ship McKee and Talbott had arrived in.

No sight ever gladdened his heart more than that of the great, competent-looking monster. The ramp was down and all was darkness inside.

"Shall I go ahead and check?" Nicko asked.

"It wouldn't help. If anyone's in there they'd probably nab you."

"Maybe I don't nab as easily as you think," Nicko growled.

"Anyhow, there isn't time. I think that crew spotted us when we entered the field. We've got to get in and away."

"Once inside we can lock the hatches and hold them off until we blast."

"You think so?" Mike asked. "With that funny fire ray they've got?"

"Well, maybe they just won't see us then."

"Let's hope not."

Nicko went up the ramp first. Mike followed with Doree in his arms. The H'Lorkan warrior brought up the rear. Into the dark

maw of the ship they went, where Nicko found a utility flashlight on its hook near the door to the companionway. He sent a beam on ahead. "Holy Mother Mars!" he croaked.

The light flashed back off thousands of brilliant jewels almost blinding them. The companionway was strewn inches deep in multicolored gems.

"That's about what I figured," Mike said. "Those two have been loading loot ever since they set down here. I'll bet every cabin's packed to the guards."

This was true. As they moved through the ship it was like walking in the treasure house of a Neptunian robber baron. "There's well over a billion in here," Nicko marveled. "Whatever you say about our friends—they aren't small timers."

"It will be a touchy job getting this ship off the ground," Mike said.

Nicko grinned hideously. "Want to stop and throw a few tons overboard?"

"There's no time or believe me, I would. Let's get to the control cabin."

It was the one cabin in which no wealth was stored. In the place of jewels and bar-gold there was some-

thing else. It seemed McKee and Talbott had not been as negligent of their hoard as it had first appeared.

The half-dozen native guards in the control room allowed the four to enter, standing close against the near wall. Then they fell upon them. Taken by surprise and attacked by a greater number, the fugitives had no chance. The H'Lorkan warrior, last into the room, fought bravely, but when the lights were turned on, the prisoners had been swiftly cuffed and subdued.

Doree had been jerked cruelly from Mike's arms and he saw a tall native warrior just disappearing through the door carrying her in his arms.

Mike's shoulders slumped as he tasted the bitter dregs of defeat . . .

They were led through the city streets under heavy guard, streets brightly illuminated by myriad glowing balls. The populace eyed them curiously, their importance evidently indicated by the escort of a dozen grim soldiers.

Only Mike and Nicko and M'Landa took the long walk up the avenue, Doree having

been spirited away. Mike was a man in deep torment as he wondered helplessly about her fate. Was she already dead? Had she been made the plaything of some high official? Of McKee or Talbott or both? This last thought brought red rage flashing into his heart.

They were taken into a huge, gloomy building and down a long corridor. As they approached it, a sound greatened before them; a rolling muted thunder of mixed anger, pain, and terror. They entered a long, narrow corridor, one wall broken at regular intervals by small metal doors. Mike realized the sound came from beyond these doors—from the angry throats of prisoners—that this could be nothing other than the city's prison. There was no doubt of it.

The cavalcade stopped. One of the doors was unlocked and thrown open, the three pushed roughly inside. The door slammed, the lock was turned and the guards stalked away as they had come.

The interior of the cell was very dim. Mike blinked his eyes, striving to pierce the dimness. He opened them and got a surprise. This was more of a cage than a prison.

The entire wall opposite the door consisted of bars.

The three went forward and stood in mute wonder at what they saw. The cells were elevated and ran in a circle around an amphitheater—a great lighted pit—so that the prisoners were spectators at the drama that went on below.

It was indeed a strange place, this pit, its purpose temporarily obscure to the three prisoners. It contained great vats of steaming, multicolored liquids, many tables, a great number and variety of frames, racks, and instruments.

There were perhaps a dozen men at work down there. They appeared to be making preparation for what was to follow. Mike wondered about their occupation, then turned sharply on Nicko.

"What's the matter with you? Why aren't you finding out about this?"

Nicko stared in amazement. "Me? How the devil can I—?"

"The H'Lorkan. He might be able to give you some information. Ask him!"

Nicko shuddered as though coming out of a daze. "Sure. I guess my wheels got kind of stopped."

M'Landa, who never seem-

ed to speak unless spoken to, answered Nicko's questions calmly. Mike watched the two as they conversed; saw Nicko's increasing indignation and horror. "All right!" Mike snapped. "Don't keep it to yourself. What did he say?"

"Not much. Just that these are the high priests of the Ptomenties. They prepare the bodies of the dead for burial and their job is to make them look so life-like that you wouldn't even know they were dead. This is their experimental laboratory—where they keep their hands in. They experiment on the prisoners."

As the chill went through Mike, he saw four guards who had been stationed on the far side of the pit acknowledge a sign from one of the priests and start toward a staircase leading to the prisoner's balcony.

They stopped at one of the cells and unlocked a door set in the barred front. As they entered a roar of hatred went up from every cell in the dreadful circle.

As he watched, Mike was conscious of the fact that only he and Nicko were watching the proceedings, that M'Landa's face was not

glued to the bars. The thing's too horrible for the H'Lorkan to take, Mike thought. He's crouching back there behind us—covering his face most likely. And I can't say I blame him.

The guards came forth from the cell dragging a screaming victim, a tall naked specimen who bested even the Ptomenites in physical perfection. Here, Mike realized, was truly a man.

The screams had been from rage, not from fear. As the door snapped behind him, the victim stopped screaming, evidently realizing this was the end, that escape was now impossible. He raised his head, a look of contempt lighting his handsome features. He walked proudly amidst the guards. He seemed completely indifferent to whatever fate awaited him.

Mike stared as the man was led to the center of the pit. Chains were clamped to his wrists and ankles. Then the guards lifted him, holding him horizontal. One of the priests extended his arms upward, over the prone man, and seemed to be mouthing a prayer or incantation. He appeared to Mike to be asking some diety to accept this poor offering.

This ceremony over, the

guards walked with the helpless man toward a great vat of smoking purple liquid. But at this moment, Mike's attention was diverted. A door had opened far down the circle and two figures were approaching. As the guards lifted the unfortunate prisoner and threw him in the vat a great roar of fury went up from the circle of cells. And Mike recognized the approaching figures.

McKee and Talbott.

McKee was amply bandaged about the head and shoulders. Talbott appeared to have come off better, only his right wrist and elbow tightly wrapped.

They moved past the cells until they were confronting Mike and Nicko. There they stopped. McKee, the fat one, grinned and glanced at his companion. "Dangerous looking specimens, aren't they?"

Talbott wore a sneer. "Quite. The priests will have a lot of fun with the scaly creature. I understand they're already discussing him—eager to get their hands on him."

Mike's rage tore at his own throat. He strove for control of his voice. "What have you swine done with Doree?"

A look of disappointment came on Talbott's face. "I



wanted her for—for other things, but I wasn't able to handle it. So she comes in here like the rest."

"You mean they're going to throw her into that—?" the question was from Nicko as every scale on his body quivered.

Mike saw that the prisoner below had now been removed from the vat. He had been laid on a table and one of the priests was advancing upon the body with a long shining needle in his hand. He pointed the needle very carefully at a place on the man's skull.

"She's next, I understand," Talbott was saying easily. She is in the other block. Only male prisoners on this side. They'll bring her in soon. It will be quite a show. Perhaps we'll stay to watch."

Mike could control himself no longer. He flung himself against the bars like a wild beast. Even though in no danger, McKee drew back in alarm. He said, "The sooner that one's in the Hall of the Dead, the better."

Mike had been conscious of a hand touching his arm but he had paid no attention. Now, as the two Terran turned to leave, he turned also, with tears of helpless anger welling in his eyes. It

was M'Landa. The H'Lorkan spoke.

"What's he saying?" Mike asked.

As M'Landa spoke, a quick change came over Nicko. He whirled and stared back in to the cell. "He says there's another man in this cell with us. He's been talking to him. He's a Baserite."

Now Mike saw the man sitting in a shadow against the wall. Two things had kept him from noticing before—the dim light and the incidents of terrible interest down in the pit. As they approached, the man got to his feet and spoke. Mike could not understand what he said, but he now knew the man thrown brutally into the vat of purple liquid had also been a Baserite. This man in the cell could have been his twin.

"Are you able to understand him?" Mike asked Nicko.

"Sure. He said he was watching us—trying to figure out whether we were spies?"

"Spies! Spying on whom?"

The questions and answers were going back and forth through Nicko. He asked the Baserite. The man said, "Upon me."

"Who are you?"

"I am Mertaan, a fighting Prince of Baser. I was taken from a Baserite ship."

"Too bad, fellow. I'm sorry."

"It was no accident. I arranged to be taken."

"That hardly makes any sense."

The man spoke through grim lips, his clear eyes blazing. "That's why I wondered about you—wondered if our plot was suspected. We can't take a chance."

"Your plot?"

"Yes. But I think you are genuine prisoners."

Nicko translated and added, "You can be damned sure about that."

"What plot are you talking about?" Mike asked.

"Baser attacks the Ptomenites in force tonight."

"I'm glad to hear that but I don't see how you can be much help in here."

"This is one facet of the plan. We corrupted a scant few of the Ptomenite guards. They are our men."

An odd thought struck Nicko. "We're glad to hear that too, but could you tell me something? With gold and jewels lying around on the ground what kind of bait lures a man on this planet."

"Our women are the most beautiful and exciting fe-

males in existence," the Baserite said grimly.

Nicko whistled and Mike snapped. "Quit taking up time with silly questions. We want to know more of this plot."

Mertaan took a key from the front of his jacket. "There is one or more Baserites in every cell of this block. Each has a key that will unlock his cell. The Baserite war fleet comes over soon. When we hear the whine of the ships, we strike. Are you with us?"

"We could hardly be with the Ptomenites."

Mertaan eyed Nicko suspiciously. "Is the strange one also with us?"

"Just wait and find out!" Nicko said.

The Baserite turned even grimmer of face. "I am taking no chances. This plan must work. My brother just died down there in their reeking vat—"

Mike was astounded. "You mean you had a key? You could send the whole cell block to his rescue? But you let him die?"

Ice glazed over the pain in the Baserite's eyes. "There is much more at stake here than one life. A nation. The time was not right. I had hoped

my brother would be spared a few minutes longer but it was not to be."

Mike marveled anew. Truly—these Baserites were men of iron will. "When?" Mike asked grimly.

"Soon." Mertaan took a small, strange-looking weapon from his pocket. It resembled a pistol enough to be identified as such. "I wish I could offer you arms, but smuggling them in was very risky. What few we have are in the hands of picked warriors."

Sweat was standing out on Mike's brow. "Never mind the guns. I just hope it's soon. The next one to go into that vat is a girl who—"

The Baserite's eyes filled with quick sympathy. "One of you, my friend?"

"One of us."

"I can only hope the ships come first."

Mike licked his dry lips. "But if they don't—you say you have some guns—the keys." He was looking at the Baserite with fixed calculation, his thoughts transparent.

Mertaan had no difficulty in divining them. "We cannot move until the ships come. If you strive to change this I shall kill you swiftly and silently. I shall kill every-

one in the cell to insure silence."

Mike's look remained fixed. He knew he did not have the courage to watch Doree die horribly when there was a key and a weapon within his reach. He deliberately forced the cold look from his face but whether the Baserite's suspicion was lulled, he could not tell.

Mertaan smiled coldly and said, "There is another of your kind in the cell block."

Mike took a step forward, but the Baserite stepped warily back. "An old man?" Mike asked.

"A very old man. He is four cells down. We know nothing of him because no one can speak his language."

Professor Brandon! Mike sent up a silent prayer of thanksgiving. "He will be released when the time comes?"

"If he chooses. None will be forced to go against their wishes, but I cannot imagine anyone refusing."

Mike turned to the bars gripping them hard. Several priests were working ghoulishly over the body of the dead Baserite. Mike looked toward the various entrances to the pit. Through which of these would they bring

Doree? He prayed that none of the doors would open.

But as though part of a plan to torture him, one of the doors opened suddenly. Two guards came through.

They were leading Doree.

She was very pale and seemed to Mike to have grown increasingly beautiful. She wore a simple golden robe and the guards did not treat her as roughly as they had handled the Baserite. Small consolation.

She had found a great courage and walked serenely with her head held high and Mike's pride and love almost burst his heart. Desperately he tried to keep control over himself.

Doree advanced under close scrutiny of the guards to the point at which the Baserite had been slain. She appeared empty of all fear.

Then a priest advanced and stood for a moment looking at her. In his hands he held two lengths of golden chain. A great silence fell over the watching prisoners in the cells, every eye glued on the priest and this beautiful girl.

Then a great roar of anger arose as the priest reached out and whipped Doree's gown from her body. She

stood naked in the center of the pit.

Mike went mad. With a roar he turned and hurled himself upon Mertaan.

The latter, even though sharply alert for attack, was not quick enough to get his weapon into action against Mike's lightning rush. Mike closed with him and they went down.

The Baserite was probably the stronger of the two, but his strength was no match for Mike's demoniacal rage. His hands went around the Baserite's throat. "Must I kill you?" he snarled, "or will you give me the key?"

There was no fear in Mertaan's expression but now, under pressure of Mike's steel fingers, it changed. He appeared to be listening for his own death.

But not for his death. He tore frantically at Mike's fists and got a few words past them. "Listen—listen, man! Can't you hear them? The ships are coming over! The time is now!"

Mike could not understand the words but the meaning got through to him as a high whining sound transcended the roar of the prisoners. And Mike realized the roar had not been caused by the priest's unveiling of Doree's

beautiful body, but by the whine from above. The prisoners knew that the moment had come and they were already pouring from the cells.

Mike sprang to his feet and lifted the Baserite. The latter snatched the key from his jacket and unlocked the front cell-gate. Mike went through first to find himself packed into a plunging, screaming mob.

Here and there he spotted a Baserite frantically trying to establish some sort of order in the ranks of the prisoners. But they remained a snarling, bloodthirsty wave of disorganized vengeance. Mike tore his way savagely through the pack with Nicko and M'Landa close behind him.

"We've got to get down first!" he yelled. "She'll be killed in the rush!" Even now, below them, the panicked priests were knocking each other down in their rush for the exits.

Nicko pushed forward. "Let me go first! I'll make way!"

And he did. He flexed his scales until each one stood out from his ugly body like a razor-edged knife. Then he charged the mob. Blood splashed until Nicko was a great red smear. Those he hit

screamed in pain and fell back, leaving an avenue down which the three raced.

They came to a stairway and as they tumbled into the pit, Mike looked swiftly over his shoulder. He was thinking of Mertaan's weapon. But it was not available. Mertaan had been lost in the mob of screaming prisoners.

Mike snatched up an odd-looking instrument from a table he passed. He knew nothing of its original use but it would make an excellent club. He baptized it by catching a fleeing, terrified priest and splitting his skull with one blow. This brought him within a few steps of where Doree lay. She had been knocked to the floor as the desperate priests sought to escape the wrath of their prisoners.

Mike's eyes were only for her. He did not see a guard nearby who turned suddenly and charged him with the flat ugly sword gripped tight in his fist. Mike knelt down to lift Doree. The sword plunged down. But instead of going into Mike's back, it was driven deep into the breast of M'Landa who had hurled himself forward.

Nicko, with a curse belled in some obscure dialect,

leaped forward and took the guard into his hands. He lifted the guard and held him aloft with one hand. With the other he tore the man's throat out and hurled him dying and bloody across the pit.

The whole building trembled at that moment, obviously from a bomb hurled off a Baserite ship. But Mike and Nicko were scarcely aware of this new thunder. Mike had set Doree on her feet and was now holding the fallen H'Lorkan warrior in his arms. Gently he withdrew the sword. There was a lump in his throat. He said, "Thanks, friend. You'll never be forgotten. I will always remember."

M'Landa smiled. He spoke and Nicko interpreted. "This is a fine worthy death. I could ask for no more. I die pleasantly, in the hope that the Ptomenites are brought down forever."

Then he was dead and there was no time to mourn him. "Back upstairs," Mike said. "Your father is in a cell there. We've got to get him and then find a way out of here and to the ship—if we aren't too late. I've got a hunch McKee and Talbott will be heading in the same direction."

Nicko had picked up Doree's robe. He threw it over her shoulders and he and Mike formed a cordon in front and in back of the girl, Nicko going first. They headed for a stairway while all about them bloody slaughter was taking place.

The priests had found the exit doors mysteriously locked and what few guards were in the pit proved to be helpless against the outraged horde from above. The priests and the guards were being torn to pieces as though by the fangs of maddened dogs. The screams of terror and agony were a crescendo drowning the whine of the ships overhead.

Professor Brandon was crouching in the far corner of the cell. A man of peace, this place of blood and confusion was beyond his conception. He was in a daze, his mind having thrown up a buffer against horror.

Doree's arms went around him but Mike pushed her back almost roughly. "There is no time," he said. "We've got to get out of here." He picked the frail Brandon up in his arms. "You take the lead, Nicko. Take my club. It's up to you to cut a path through."

They left the cell and went out onto the balcony and discovered that the frantic priests had at last broken through the locked doors of their prison-pit. The ones remaining alive had fled the place with the prisoners on their heels.

Sounds from beyond indicated that some of the frenzied prisoners had abandoned the chase and were now stalking through the building, killing and looting.

"Out this way," Mike directed, indicating an open doorway. "This is the side toward the blast field."

"The passage is empty," Nicko said. "Come on."

"Watch yourself!" Mike snapped.

And it was well that Nicko did because halfway down the passage, three of the blood-crazed prisoners leaped on him from a side passage. One brought a club down viciously, aimed by sheer chance at the base of Nicko's skull, the one vulnerable spot on his body. Nicko avoided the blow and smashed the prisoner's head.

The other two landed astride Nicko. It was like jumping into a nest of sharp knives. Ripped, bloody, screaming, they staggered away and fled.

No one else challenged the right of way and Nicko led the party out into the night. Overhead, the sky was bright with battle and here and there about the area, there were sharp skirmishes, evidently between Baserite and Ptomenite troops. There was no way to tell which way the battle swayed.

"Straight ahead," Mike ordered. "Skirt the wall of that building."

They reached the field, ran across the last open area and faded in among the ships. Mike smiled grimly as he saw the dark, unlighted outline of the Terran space craft. They had beaten McKee and Talbott! Perhaps the two scoundrels had been slain. "Up the ramp, quick!" Mike directed.

But McKee and Talbott had not been killed. Nor had Mike beaten them to the ship. He had proceeded Nicko up the ramp and as he came to the hatch, the lights of the ship flashed on and Talbott stepped forth holding a Terran pistol. Beyond him, inside, stood McKee and the Princess Katal'halee.

"I told you all we had to do was wait here—that they would show up," Talbott said.

McKee pushed forward, a

somewhat mystified expression on his face. "Sure, but I still can't figure how you convinced this Katal babe they're responsible for the uprising."

Talbott's smile was one of grim satisfaction. "I have persuasive ways," he said. "I'll back them down the ramp and she can pronounce sentence and I'll execute them."

"Why stall?" McKee asked. "Kill all five of them and let's get out of here. About time we started thinking of our own skins."

"I'm taking the Princess with us, you idiot!"

"You're the idiot!" McKee snapped. "Not letting well enough alone!"

The proud Ptomenite Princess pushed forward, her cold eyes on Mike and he realized of course, why the two Terran schemers could talk so freely. Katal'halee could not understand a word they said.

Talbott motioned with the gun and Mike backed slowly down the ramp. He was still holding Professor Brandon in his arms, the old man's eyes blank and uncomprehending.

"That'll do," Talbott said. He stepped aside and the

Princess pointed a contemptuous finger at the group. She spoke sharply and Mike looked swiftly at Nicko.

"It's a death sentence," Nicko said. "She's accusing us of everything but stopping up the royal sink."

The Princess now stepped aside and motioned imperiously to Talbott. He raised his gun.

But a new voice barked sharply. A fine needle of crystalline ray shot out of the darkness and melted the gun in Talbott's hand. Talbott jerked his seared member back with a squall of pain.

Mertaan stepped into the circle of light. He looked at Mike. "I had reason to follow you," he said and Nicko quickly interpreted.

"But it can wait a few moments." He turned to the Princess Katal'halee and a hatred built up over generations flashed between them. Yet, their eyes seemed also to mirror a mutual respect. Mertaan said, "You are wrong about your betrayers. It was these two who made the arrangements—contacted our allies within your city. The tall one is very good at getting his points over with gestures and pictures."

Evidently, on this planet,



even enemies did not lie to each other. Katal'halee's eyes turned on the pair with a venom that sent every drop of blood from their faces. "What did they ask in return?"

"Only seats of power in the city after we conquered it."

Nicko was translating for Mike and the latter whistled softly. "So that was the idea. The jewels in the ship were only an ace in the hole."

"But they must figure the battle goes bad for the Baserites," Nicko said. "They planned to take off."

"The last minute," Mertaan told Katal'halee, "your fine friends turned milk-white. They had no stomach for the battle they helped arrange."

"A truce between us, Baserite," the Princess said. "Give me these two and a gun with which to march them off into the darkness. You and I can settle accounts later."

Mike was astounded when, without hesitation, Mertaan took another weapon from his person and handed it to the Princess. Mike's flesh crawled as he stood rigid, expecting a blast from the royal Ptomenite that would

wipe them all out. He wondered at Mertaan's gullibility.

But evidently the word of these fierce people could be taken at face value. The Princess ignored all but McKee and Talbott. She pointed the gun at them and motioned. Now they understood what had transpired. Sweat streamed from their faces.

"No!—please, no!" Talbott screamed. "He lies! He tells you lies!" They both fell to their knees.

Mertaan smiled coldly at them. "Where are your pictures and persuasive manners now, scum!" He kicked them cruelly to their feet and they staggered off into the darkness before Katal'halee's weapon, still pleading for mercy.

Mertaan appeared to forget about them. He turned to Mike. "Into your ship. Quick! There is not too much time."

"You're helping us to make our escape?"

"I have a reason. Hurry."

They went up the ramp and inside. Mertaan stopped just outside the hatch and Mike turned. The Baserite said, "I know not from whence you came, stranger, but I ask that you go back to your world, wherever it is. Tell your people of us and plead our cause. Tell of the

generations of cruelty on this planet and bring help for the oppressed. This I ask of you."

"But this uprising—your attack—"

Mertaan shook his head. "It does not go well. We will fight to the death as my people have fought before but I fear the result. The Ptomenites are powerful."

"Thanks." Mike held out his hand.

The Baserite took it, a little clumsily and smiled a farewell to Nicko who was peering around Mike, interpreting. "Go with your gods," the Baserite said. Then he turned and hurried back to the carnage and the bloodshed . . .

"Father is resting," Doree said. "I'm sure he'll be all right in a little while. The

treatment he received was a shock."

"It would have shaken a far stronger man. He'll be all right when he gets back to Terra and they honor him for this discovery."

The ship rocketed smoothly through space. Doree slipped into Mike's arms. "He found what he wanted. So did I." Mike kissed her.

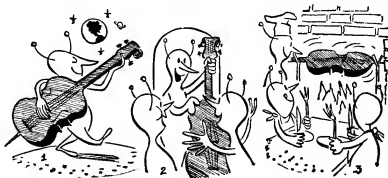
A while later she asked, "Do you think the Baserites won?"

Mike stared out through the port, his eyes sad. "Somehow I don't think so. We can only hope. But soon a few thousand ships will appear in their skies. Their doors will be opened to all the universe and tyranny will not survive."

"Then we'll go back," Doree said.

"Then we'll go back."

#### THE END

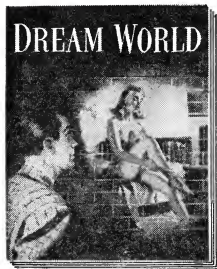


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## THE REVOLVING FAN



**INSIDE AND SCIENCE FICTION ADVERTISER.** No. 50. Ron Smith, Box 356, Times Square Station, New York 36, N.Y. 5/\$1. 73 pp.

A fine, competent fanzine, written and collated with taste, **INSIDE** is always worth its price. Proceedings start off with Randy Garrett's poem, "Memo to E. A. Robinson," surprisingly good only because it deserves a wider audience. Next, a confusing satire by Larry T. Shaw, "The Baker Murder Case," followed by a collection of cartoons by Dave Foley, "Cheaper by the Billion," which are excellent, if gruesome. The main section of the zine is taken up with H. P. Lovecraft, and Lin Carter's "The Books" with its bibliography of all books either invented by HPL or by one or another of the cult which sprang up around him, is excellent. August Derleth (one of the founders of the HPL cult), in his "Weird Tales in Retrospect," has written an uneven and hasty, ponderously didactic article, but Edmond Hamilton's "Time Traveling in Ohio" is good old s-f nostalgia. William F. Nolan's "Dark Souls in Jeopardy" is an only so-so satire, and the rest of the issue is devoted to the usual ads, think pieces, and poems.

**STELLAR.** No. 9. 1014 N. Tuckahoe St., Falls Church, Virginia. 15¢; 5/50¢. 58 pp.

The size of this issue is explainable by the fact that **STELLAR** has an issue of **ABJECT** stapled in—the latter a satire

on Pete Vorzimmer's 'zine, **ABSTRACT**. Leadoff is Ted White's "One Jump," a take-off on modern s-f magazines, fiction, and Mickey Spillane. "The Daring Young Man With the Three-Speed Mimeo," a rather juvenile impressionistic collection by Carl Brandon somewhat spoils the effect of the former, but John L. Magnus' "The Peon Papers," which hauls PEON over the coals is effective. Larry Stark's "The Fanged Fan," however, makes the average .500. This 'zine will appeal to all those who see fandom as a way of life. For others, who can take fandom or leave it, the contents are somewhat esoteric.

**FANTASY-TIMES**. Vol. 11, No. 254. Fandom House, P.O. Box 2331, Paterson 23, N.J. This issue: 25¢ to non-subscribers; 10¢ to subscribers. 38 pp.

This shows how a reviewer can break his resolutions: I swore that I wouldn't cover F-T for some time, since I felt that I had 1) covered it amply in the past; and 2) ought to lean over backwards because I personally like it so much. But this fat 15th Anniversary issue broke me down. Here, instead of the short items with which the four-to-six page average F-T whets your appetite, are real articles such as Ray Palmer's "Science Fiction 15 Years Ago and Today," Roger Dard's summing up of S-F in Australia, Robert W. Lowndes' "Cycles," in which he discusses just that in s-f publications, and other items by Thos. S. Gardner, Arthur Jean Cox, Robert P. Mills, Bill Blackbeard, Anthony Boucher, Donald E. Ford, Larry Shaw, and Sam Moskowitz. This issue must be in your files, if you collect, write, edit, or just enjoy s-f.

**PEON**. No. 37. Charles Lee Riddle, U.S.S. Cascade (AD-16), Fleet Post Office, New York, N.Y. 15¢; 8/\$1. 22 pp.

Poor CPO Riddle, working like a beaver, is doing the best he can, but although PEON is still one of the better 'zines, it doesn't have the zest and evidence of forethought that previous issues showed. Contents: Ron Smith's "The Odds Against You," a somewhat weak short story whose effect depends upon its last-line punch ending; Jim Harmon's "Harmony," which proves to be meanderings anent the slump in science fiction pro-and-fanzines; Joe Gibson's "O, This Bally

**Dashed Air Age,**" proves, quite convincingly to me, at least, that despite the rosy picture of enormous flights of helicoptering commuters s-f writers have painted, such a delineation will be far from true. James E. Gunn's "Science Fiction and the Readers' Digest" discusses the differences in s-f and the type of slick material the Digest publishes. In "So Long, Joe," Bob Tucker discusses fans, rumor, libel, and responsibility; while P. Kruis' "Scraping the Barrel" is a report on South African science fiction.

**HYPHEN. No. 16. Walt Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Rd., Belfast, Northern Ireland. 15¢; 29 pp.**

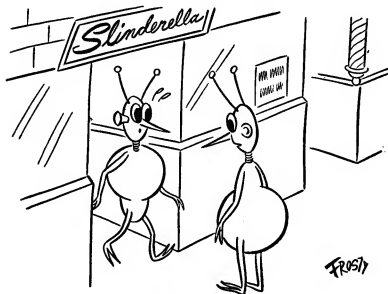
Behold how science fiction spreads over the Earth—Australia, South Africa, and now Northern Ireland, where that pixy of s-f, Walt Willis, holds forth. It is literally impossible to give a connected, rational account of the contents of this 'zine, any more than it would be possible to explain the story of "Alice in Wonderland" to a person who had never read the book. But the contents of this Special Irish Issue are as mad-cap as ever: "The New Luke in Irish Fandom" is James White's high keen of allana over (among other things) the departure of BNF Bob Shaw for Canada. John Berry's "Twilight of the Ghods" is a lengthy epic of madness and merriement, with some of the most 'orrible puns and interlineations I've ever read; George Charters' "The History of Irish Fandom" is an unblushingly admiring glance at George Charters, Fan Extraordinaire, by George Charters, and seconded by G. Charters; and finally, "The Glass Bushel" is Bob Shaw's account of how and why he went to Canada. Sprightly, visible, HYPHEN is a fine mixture of sense and nonsense.

**STF-IN-GEN. No. 2. Jerry DeMuth, 3223 Ernst St., Franklin Pk., Illinois. 20¢. 34 pp.**

Two short stories, "The Martian Censorship," and "Time Is a Precious Thing" are by Jerry DeMuth. An article, "What Fools These Mortals Be" is also by Jerry DeMuth. The Editorial, by Jerry DeMuth, follows hard on the cover, drawn by Jerry DeMuth, and sundry cartoons by one J. DeMuth. To end the proceedings, there is also a "Last Minute Notes," by

J. DeM. Which reminds me of the story . . . Orson Welles, at the height of his fame (after the Martian radio drama scare) once went out on a speaking tour, and found himself booked into a Montana town at the height of a blinding snowstorm. When the curtain rose in the high school auditorium, Welles was received by a scattering of applause from the sparse number of people in the seats. Surveying the scant gathering, Orson cleared his throat and recited: "My name is Orson Welles. I am a writer. I am a director. I am a producer. I am an actor. I paint. I compose. I sing. I am an amateur magician. I design sets. I also design men's clothes. I am an expert fencer . . ." Then he paused, and once again surveyed the audience, to end with— "Isn't it a pity there are so many of me, and so few of you?"

Oh, yes. Beside the youthful maunderings of Mr. DeMuth, there is a (?) by Kent Corey, and two poems by Val Walker and Alan C. Elms.



"They said I bulged in the wrong place."



*We've been deluged with names of science-fiction pen pals who want to join the Space Club. And therein lies the source of our current embarrassment. We just didn't expect such an enthusiastic reception for the new feature. That is, we didn't expect it quite so soon. Our idea was that it would build gradually as the news got around. But the news got around mighty fast, so the pages we allotted to The Space Club were filled to overflowing and we're literally up to our knees in names. So be patient with us. Next month The Space Club gets more space.*

*And one more thing—the Club isn't just for science-fiction fans. It's for everybody. Of course, if strangers to the fun of reading science fiction happen to get converted by our dyed-in-the-wool fans—well, that's just fine!*

**THERESE ANDERSON,**  
BOX 334-C, ROUTE 5, SAN  
ANTONIO, TEXAS . . . 24  
years old, Therese is employed  
in the circulation department  
of a metropolitan newspaper.  
She has been an s-f fan for  
ten years. Looks forward to  
the opportunity of writing to  
other fans.

old, 5'6", blue eyes, blond hair.  
An airman whose interests are  
acting, directing, writing,  
traveling, cryptography, para-  
physics, flying saucers. Espe-  
cially interested in hearing  
from Armed Forces personnel  
who would like to form an s-f  
club and/or a fanzine for just  
members of the military.

**A/IC ROBERT S. ADELER,**  
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WEATHER SQDN., APO 845,  
NEW YORK, N.Y. . . . 26 years

**TOMMY BIGLIN, 4227**  
**ELBA ST., NEW ORLEANS**  
25, LA. . . . Tommy is looking  
for s-f correspondents in the



South. He is 13 years old and a freshman in high school.

**JACK CALDWELL, 7846 15TH AVE., KENOSHA, WISC. . .** 16-year-old student, Jack's interests are golf, baseball, basketball, singing. Favorite hobby is reading science fiction.

**MARJORIE CASANOVA, RT. 1, BOX 321-A, TOPANGA CANYON, CALIFORNIA . . .** Marjorie has been reading science fiction for a while. She feels that it is an excellent way of tapping unused knowledge which will find scientific fulfillment someday.

**OSWALD J. CHANDIA, 22 McARTHUR AVE., HALF-WAY TREE P.O. JAMAICA, BRITISH WEST INDIES . . .** 30 years old, employed as a registrar in the Survey Dept. Hobbies: reading, photography. Interested in obtaining back issues of s-f magazines. Hopes to correspond with other fans who read s-f solely for entertainment.

**SGT. LOUISA Z. CHANEY, WAC DET., FT. BELVOIR, VA. . .** Louisa has been an s-f fan since 1952. Van Vogt and Bradbury are her favorites.

**HOWARD CLINE, R. 1, MIDDLETOWN, VA. . .** 15 years old, Howard belongs to the science-fiction book club.

He never misses **Amazing Stories** and would like to hear from other loyal readers.

**ROGER DARD, P.O. BOX S1387, G.P.O., PERTH WESTERN AUSTRALIA . . .** 35 years old, Roger has been reading s-f for over twenty years and has been an active fan for almost ten. Wants to hear from those in North America who are interested in trading magazines, paperback books and Sunday newspapers containing colored funnies.

**MRS. RICHARD DE MORY, 285 W. BUENA VISTA, HIGHLAND PARK 3, MICH. . .** A science-fiction follower for many years, Mrs. De Mory would like to get acquainted with other fans in her area.

**DANIEL J. FARLEY, 148-4802, VMA-212 MAG-3, AIR-FMF-PAC, C/O FPO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF. . .** 21 years old, Daniel is an aviation mechanic with the Marines in Hawaii. He hails from Chicago.

**RAYMOND L. HOZIAN, 5023 HARLEM CT., CLEVELAND 3, OHIO . . .** 19 years old, 5'2". Raymond enjoys reading s-f.

**MRS. KENNETH KOWITZ, 8628 REPUBLIC, VAN DYKE, MICH. . .** Mrs. Kowitz is looking forward to correspondence with other s-f enthusiasts.

**RICHARD E. GORDON, 107-17 E. 27TH TERR., INDEPENDENCE, MO. . . .** 14-year-old s-f enthusiast, Richard says he plays a mean trombone. He and two other boys from Independence, who also appear in the Space Club, form an out of this world triumverate.

**LYNN A. HICKMAN, 710 BLVD., N.E., ORANGEBURG, S.C. . . .** 30 years old, Lynn is a collector of s-f magazines and other magazines. Publishes a fanzine. Would like to hear from fans in the South. Name of fanzine is J.D.

**ALLAN HOWARD, 101 FAIRMOUNT AVE., NEWARK 7, N.J. . . .** The Eastern Science-Fiction Association is a group of adult s-f readers who meet the first Sunday of each month to further their interest in their favorite form of literature. Each month they try to have someone from the pro s-f world as feature speaker. Meetings are held at the Slovak Sokol Hall, 358 Morris Ave., at 2:30. For information write Allan.

**GLENN KING, JR., 9 E. MAIN ST., WAPPINGERS FALLS, N.Y. . . .** 14 years old, Robert's favorite authors include Heinlein, Sheckley, Asimov. Hobbies are: astronomy, rocketry, zoology, baseball, popular music, writing science fiction and fantasy.

**ROBERT E. LEE, A/3C JOHN R. RAMSEY, AF 145-80048, 551ST EM SQD., OTIS A.F.B., MASS. . . .** 20 years old, John is interested in science fiction and electronics.

**ALLEN MARDIS, JR., 433 WEST WILSON, BEMENT, ILL. . . .** 16-year-old Allen has many interests: s-f time travel, E.S.P., psycho-kinetics, writing, electronics, jet propulsion, photography, politics, stamp collecting. Would like to start a midwest s-f correspondence club.

**GEORGE E. McPHADEN, 10681 JOHNSON AVE., CUPERTINO, CALIF. . . .** 31 years old, married, an industrial engineering student and an electronics experimenter. George is a long-time reader of s-f. His main interest lies in robotics. He even has a couple of possible robots in mind.

**RALPH E. MILLER, 7 LORNE ST., DORCHESTER 24, MASS. . . .** Hopes to hear from other Space Club members.

**RAYMOND E. MILLER, 16-D GOMPERS APTS., EAST ST. LOUIS, ILL. . . .** Raymond is 16 years old. He works in a grocery store. Very interested in s-f, he buys every book he can get his hands on. Hobby is astronomy, has the use of a friend's telescope.



**BY THE READERS**

Dear Ed:

I have been an s-f fan for fifteen years now, and during this time I have formed an aversion to "continued" stories. If I happen to read a story before noticing whether it is a serial, I feel very let-down when I find that the next issue will carry the final installment.

As a result, before buying a new issue, I check the title page and the last page of each story to see if there are any serials. If there are, I disappointedly pass up that issue.

Instead of running two-part serials in your regular issues, why not put out another magazine with say two serial length novels in each issue: In this way those who like the longer novels will be able to read them in their entirety, and those who like the shorter novels and novelettes will both be satisfied.

Robert G. Bartels  
205 Gelston Avenue  
Brooklyn 9, N.Y.

• *That may be true, but what about the readers who like both short novels and serials plus short stories. We hope they will all be satisfied with what they find between the covers of AMAZING. We would like to put three or four new books and perhaps in time we shall. We're making a good start with DREAM WORLD.*

Dear Editor:

*Amazing* and the other topnotch s-f magazines are good because they provide exercise in advanced scientific thinking for varieties of peoples.

How on earth could you let such an archaic cartoon slip through as the one on page 89 of the November issue?

Using corn plasters is so old hat that only those who buy reading glasses in variety stores stop at the corn plaster counter.

This cartoon, as is, rates a smile. Had you done it with a chiropodist-foot specialist sign there and a D.S.C. standing there in front that would have been worth a real laugh out loud.

Dr. Rosemary Becker, D.S.C.  
4176 Clarendon  
Chicago 13, Ill.

• *May we hear from the corn-plaster salesman on this cartoon?*

Dear Editor:

I thought "The Monster Died at Dawn" was pretty fair, but just about all the shorts beat it. They pack a wallop. "The Idiot," I believe is about one of the best short shorts that I've found anywhere. Keep 'em coming.

James W. Ayers  
609 First St.  
Attalla, Ala.

• *Thank you, Mr. Ayers. Our writers can tell you the reason for the quality you mention, Rewrite—rewrite—rewrite. To every writer, the editor is a demon who sits behind a desk with a red pencil in each hand and a scowl on his face. And no writer will admit any editor ever made his story better.*

Dear Editor:

I see in the October issue you call for us gals who are addicted to s-f to send in our messages. Just got my copy yesterday and enjoyed it immensely. "The Judas Valley" kept me on pins and needles to the very last word. "Summer Snow

Storm" was also good. "A Place in the Sun" was not quite up to standard in my eyes.

*Amazing* has always been my favorite s-f magazine. I've missed very few issues. Don't go back to pulp size. In its present size it fits neatly into all of my purses.

Mrs. Dorothy Jeffery  
9668 $\frac{1}{2}$  120 A St.  
R.R. 7, North Surrey, B.C.

• *Love to see the gals asserting their inalienable right to be heard. So does Miss Goldsmith, our female-type assistant.*

Dear Editor:

Excellent! Marvelous and etc. for the November issue of *Amazing*. She's still the flag-ship of the science-fiction publications.

The Space Club paid off for me already. A Mr. Carter of Detroit is an ardent UFO follower as I am. Correspondence will flow between Oakland and Detroit.

From your convention report in *The Observatory*, it must have been a top success.

W. C. Brandt  
Apt. N  
1725 Seminary Ave.  
Oakland 21, Calif.

• *Only one correspondent so far, Mr. Brandt? We're surprised. You should be batting out letters to at least ten by now.*

Dear Ed:

I've been wanting to write a letter to your magazine for a long time, but always felt that you would not pay attention to a letter from a woman. I changed my mind when I read letters from women in your recent issues. I have been reading s-f for about 10 years. In my opinion *Amazing* is about the best s-f magazine going these days. The thing I like best every edition is "Or So You Say." I get a big kick out of some of the debates carried in this department.

I recently got a hold of your September '55 edition of *Amazing* and just finished reading it. I was certainly glad to

...OR SO YOU SAY

get it as it contained the first of the Johnny Mayhem series. They always will be among my favorite stories as they both fascinate and frustrate me as Johnny must be fascinated and frustrated by his never ending change of lives.

Another of my favorite s-f magazines is *Fantastic* which ranks second only to *Amazing* in my opinion. You would fulfill my heart's desire by making both magazines monthly.

Mrs. Patricia Pond  
41 S. Clinton Avenue  
Bay Shore, New York

• *Your wish is our command, Mrs. Pond. Starting with the April issue, FANTASTIC will go monthly. And for a bonus, we're putting a new magazine—DREAM WORLD—on the stands December 11th. The first issue will contain an original story by P. G. Wodehouse. COLLIERS was after this one but we got it by giving Mr. Wodehouse all the money we had plus a mortgage on our house. There's a hilarious yarn by the great Thorne Smith that you won't want to miss. So if you'll grab the first issue of DREAM WORLD, we promise you'll be a buyer for life.*

Dear Editor:

Have been out of contact with your fine magazine since late 1949. I recently picked up the September '56 issue and am happy to see that you are still printing some really great s-f tales. I especially enjoyed the story, "A World Called Crimson" as it seemed a rather new twist on the exploring planets theme.

In the event that some of your readers may be interested, I have a stack, about six feet high, of back issues of s-f magazines and various hard cover and pocket books in this category. Lots of *Amazing* and other s-f magazines dating back to the 1944-49 period. Am rather interested in disposing of either all or parts of this collection at fair prices. To those interested, I will be happy to send a list of such s-f publications with suggested prices on which they may bid if they wish. Winning bidders will be notified.

Andy Anderson  
321 5th Ave.  
Baraboo, Wisc.

continued from BACK COVER



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